# Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy

## Balʿamī's Tārīkhnāma

A.C.S. Peacock

Routledge Studies in the History of Iran and Turkey

# Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy

Balʿamī's *Tārīkhnāma* is the earliest work of Persian prose and one of the most influential works of Islamic historical writing, subsequently being translated into Arabic and Turkish and remaining in circulation for a thousand years. Although it purports to be a Persian translation of al-Tabari's famous Arabic universal history, in fact it is an independent work, presenting the history of the world from Creation down to Islamic times.

A.C.S.Peacock's new book, *Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy: Balʿamī's Tārīkhnāma* is the first research monograph on this major historical work and shows how its composition and reception were influenced by political circumstances. Commissioned by the ruler of one of the largest and most powerful Muslim states of the tenth century, the Samanid dynasty of Central Asia, and composed by his vizier, the *Tārīkhnāma* tells us much about the politics and ideology of the Samanid state, which remains comparatively unstudied despite its importance in Islamic history. Future generations continued to adapt the text in accordance with their own political concerns, meaning its manuscripts vary immensely from one another.

Using newly discovered manuscripts, this study sheds much new light, not just on mediaeval Islamic history and the development of Islamic historiography, but also on problems in manuscripts and the transmission of their texts.

**Dr Andrew Peacock** was educated at Oxford and Cambridge universities, and is a research associate at the University of Cambridge. He specializes in the history of Anatolia, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and is the author of several articles on aspects of mediaeval Islamic history and historiography.

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To my parents

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# Preface

Historical writing and prose literature in New Persian[1] both begin with the *History (Tārīkhnāma)* of Abu ʿAlī Balʿamī,[2] composed in Central Asia in the fourth/tenth century. Before the Arab conquest of Iran in the first/seventh century, the Persians of the Sāsānian Empire had a historiographical tradition of their own, written in Pahlavī or Middle Persian, a language similar to New Persian in grammar and syntax, but different in script and lacking the many Arabic works the Persians adopted into their language on conversion to Islam. However, much of this tradition is lost to us, surviving mainly in later New Persian works such as the great early poet Firdawsī's monumental verse *Shāhnāma* ('Book of Kings'). In contrast, Balʿamī's *Tārīkhnāma* marks the beginning of a long and influential historiographical tradition in Persian based on Arabic, Islamic models rather than Sāsānian ones.

The *Tārīkhnāma* is a large work, occupying five substantial volumes in the most recent edition, and covers history from Creation down to Muslim times. It became extremely popular—indeed, it was by far the most widely read work of Persian historiography, and was translated into other Islamic languages such as Arabic, Ottoman and Chaghatay Turkish, and Urdu. Manuscripts of it continued to be copied, and later printed, until the beginning of the twentieth century. No other historical work in Persian, and few in Arabic, approaches the scale or the longevity of the *Tārīkhnāma's* popularity. The mere fact that it was the principal source of knowledge about the past in the eastern Islamic world for nearly a thousand years makes it worthy of attention. The great influence it had over countless Muslims is reflected in the vast number of manuscripts of it that survive and its frequent citation in other works. Yet, as I hope to demonstrate in the course of this book, the *Tārīkhnāma* is of much interest in its own right.

The *Tārīkhnāma* is also significant because it seems to have possessed great political importance at the time it was composed. It was commissioned by the amir Manṣūr b. Nūḥ, who was ruler of much of Central Asia and parts of Iran. The dynasty to which Manṣūr belonged, the Sāmānids, are today best known for their role in reviving the Persian literary language after its eclipse by Arabic in the wake of the Muslim conquests. Their court in Bukhārā became famous as a cultural centre where both

1 New Persian is written in the Arabic script and developed in the centuries after the Arab conquests. Except where confusion with other varieties of Persian, such as Middle Persian/ Pahlavī, is likely, I shall refer to it simply as Persian.

2 Balʿamī's work is referred to by different names in the manuscripts, usually as the *Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, the *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī* or the *Tārīkhnāma-i Ṭabarī*. In this book, I shall call it the *Tārīkhnāma* to avoid confusion with the numerous other Arabic and Persian works that have the title *Tārīkh*.

Arabic and Persian literature flourished. However, from the perspective of the fourth/tenth century, the Sāmānids' fame was based less on their patronage of literature than on their role as rulers of one of the largest and most powerful states in the Islamic world. Yet it seems that the production of this historical work was a matter of great importance to the Sāmānids, for its composition was entrusted to none other than the state's *wazīr* or chief minister, Abu 'Alī Bal'amī. Thus the study of the *Tārīkhnāma* offers the opportunity of deepening our understanding not just of the fourth/tenth century renaissance of Persian literature and the birth of Persian historiography, but also the political preoccupations of the Sāmānids. Despite this dynasty's great political and cultural importance, many elements of their history remain obscure.

The reasons for studying Bal'amī's *Tārīkhnāma* are, as I have outlined, varied, and its interest is considerable from the points of view of both cultural and political history. However, it has attracted very little scholarly attention to date. In part, this is because the numerous surviving manuscripts of the *Tārīkhnāma* present formidable textual problems that need to be resolved before the work can be studied adequately. However, the most important reason for this neglect is unquestionably the traditional identification of the *Tārīkhnāma* as a translation of a famous Arabic book, the *Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa-'l-Mulūk* or 'History of Prophets and Kings' composed in Baghdad earlier in the fourth/tenth century by the famed scholar and jurist Ṭabarī (d. 310/923). Bal'amī himself claims that his intention was to provide an abridged Persian translation of this work, but in fact his version differs to such a degree from the Arabic original that it must be considered an independent work, worthy of study in its own right. Nonetheless, it is still necessary to compare and contrast it with Ṭabarī's work to understand how and why Bal'amī altered the Arabic text in his Persian version, and indeed why he sought to represent the *Tārīkhnāma* as a translation.

Bal'amī's *Tārīkhnāma* thus poses an array of questions, ranging from the origins of Persian literature and the relationship of Arabic and Persian historiography to textual criticism. A single book cannot hope to discuss them all in as much detail as they deserve, but rather to lay a foundation upon which future research can build. The sheer size of the *Tārīkhnāma* and Ṭabarī's even larger *History* preclude a detailed study of all aspects of the texts and their relationship to one another. For these reasons, this book is very much a preliminary study, and its main aims are threefold: to understand why the *Tārīkhnāma* was written; why its text came to have its current forms; and why it remained influential for so long. It is hoped that, by highlighting the *Tārīkhnāma's* complexity and importance, other scholars will be encouraged to research aspects that have been ignored or treated only cursorily here.

# Acknowledgements

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I am grateful to all those librarians who have assisted my research by granting me access to collections in their care, and to the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Turkey for allowing me to examine manuscripts in Istanbul libraries under its jurisdiction. I am also indebted to Dr Mansur Sefatgol and Dr Bahrom Abdolxalimov for assisting my research in Tehran and Tashkent respectively. My thanks go to those copyright holders who granted me permission to republish material: the Syndicate of Cambridge University Library for a reproduction of the colophon of MS Add 836, the estate of A.J.Arberry from whose *The Koran Interpreted* English versions of Qur'ānic passages are taken, the Darwin Press, Routledge, and the State University of New York Press for permission to quote from the English translation of the *History of al-Ṭabarī*.

My debt to other scholars is evident throughout my work. Special thanks are due to Charles Melville who first suggested that I study Bal'amī and supervised the original thesis, as well as reading subsequent drafts; he has been generous with his advice throughout. Elton Daniel laid the foundations for the serious study of the *Tārīkhnāma*, and although our conclusions sometimes differ, this book could not have been undertaken without his research. He has also been most kind in making available to me his unpublished work. James Montgomery, Christine van Ruymbeke, Teresa Fitzherbert and Luke Treadwell kindly gave of their time to read my work at various stages, and the latter two were generous in supplying me with their own unpublished work. All of them saved me from many mistakes, although needless to say I am responsible for the numerous ones that doubtless remain. I am also most grateful to Professor Carole Hillenbrand for her interest in my work and agreeing to include this book in 'Studies on the History of Iran and Turkey', and Routledge for their professionalism in producing it.

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# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| Add 836 | Cambridge University Library, MS Add 836. |
| Beruniy | Abu Rayhan Beruniy Oriental Institute, Tashkent |
| BNF | Bibliothèque Nationale de France |
| BSOAS | Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies |
| *CHI* | *The Cambridge History of Iran* |
| *EI2* | *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edition) |
| *EIr* | *Encyclopedia Iranica* |
| Fatih 4281 | Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul, MS Fatih 4281 |
| Fatih 4285 | Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul, MS Fatih 4285 |
| *JAOS* | *Journal of the American Oriental Society* |
| *JNES* | *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* |
| *JRAS* | *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* |
| *JSAI* | *Jerusalem Studies on Arabic and Islam* |
| Q. | *Qur'ān*, standard Egyptian edition |
| RAS | Royal Asiatic Society |
| *ZDMG* | *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* |

# Introduction

## Islamic historiography: the state of research

Although Arabic, Persian and Turkish possess rich and sophisticated traditions of historical writing, the study of the pre-modern historiography of the Middle East has scarcely begun. Numerous works languish unedited in manuscripts scattered around the libraries of the world, while many of those that have been published exist only in very defective editions.[1] Only a comparatively small number of scholarly studies—and very few monographs—have been devoted to individual works. As a result, in spite of a number of valuable general studies of Islamic historiography,[2] even the outlines of its development and characteristics remain hazy, let alone the details. Moreover, there is little comprehension of how the historiographical traditions of the three classical languages of the Islamic Middle East, Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish, relate to one another and to what extent and how they differ.

This deficiency in modern scholarship appears particularly acute when compared to the situation for mediaeval Europe, where most chronicles have not only been edited and often translated, but also studied in detail from a variety of philological and literary perspectives. As a result, we have a much clearer idea why such works were composed, for whom, and what literary devices they used to impress their audiences. For the composition of historiography in both the East and West was not a simple process of recording facts and dates.[3] Rather, much of the interest in the study of these works derives from the fact that, just as for audiences in the Greek and Roman worlds, historical events possessed a meaning not so much in themselves as through the ethical lessons they could impart. For pre-modern historians, facts could be entirely subservient to their ethical meaning, and the task of the historian was less to record them precisely than to decide 'what, and how much, to make of them to suit his own purpose'.[4] The general mediaeval perception of history differed rather from popular modern ones: whilst people today might—and often do—draw attention to the lessons that may be learned from the past, they usually have in mind an idea that 'history repeats itself', rather than that it has an ethical meaning *per se*. Thus mediaeval historical writing was rarely if ever the search for the facts about the past 'as it really was', as the nineteenth-century German historian von Ranke expressed it in a famous phrase.

1 This problem is not limited to historiography, but is true of other areas of Islamic studies too.
2 See most recently C.F.Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
3 For examples from the West, see Y.Hen and M.Innes (eds), *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
4 J.S.Meisami, 'History as literature', *Iranian Studies* 33/1–2(2000), p. 30, n. 48.

Mediaeval Islamic historiography was also closely bound up with religion and politics. Arabic historiography seems to have originated as tales about the exploits of the Prophet and his Companions. At an early date there also started to circulate stories of pre-Islamic prophets (*Isrā'īliyyāt*), which aimed to legitimize Muḥammad's position by showing that he was the last in a series of prophets stretching back through Abraham and Moses to Adam. Muslims believed that, like earlier communities, they had been offered a covenant with God that subsequently had been broken, and it was the task of historical writing to understand how this situation had arisen, and how the community *(umma)* could be redeemed.[5] From the beginning, then, historiography was associated with legitimacy, whether that of Muḥammad as a prophet or of the *umma* more generally. Political legitimacy was thus a major concern for Muslims, and every Muslim state felt the need to demonstrate its right to rule to at least some of its populace by the imagery adopted on its coins, art and architecture.[6]

Literature was another means of expressing this legitimacy, and historiography was often extensively patronized by dynasties (or, frequently, their ministers) to promote a certain vision of the origins of the ruling house, its right to hold power, and its place in Islamic history. It could also be used to encourage dynasties to act and represent themselves in a certain way. For instance, the *Niẓām al-Tawārīkh* of Bayḍāwī, written in Persian in 674/1275, seems to have been composed as part of a programme which aimed to encourage the pagan Mongol ruler of Iran, Abaqa, towards Islam and to legitimize Mongol rule by placing it in the context of Iranian history. This political programme was designed by two of the leading officials in the Mongol state in Iran, the brothers Shams al-Dīn and ʿAṭā Malik Juvaynī.[7]

On the other hand, sometimes it was the historians themselves who took the initiative in composing such legitimatory histories, in the hope of gaining the favour, or at least the attention, of the ruler or his officials.[8]

Until very recently little attention has been paid to such political preoccupations of historians themselves and their patrons. Rather, scholars were interested in extracting the bare record of events in the region's past to compose their own histories of the region. Of course, this cannot be dismissed as a fruitless endeavour, for we are often indebted to these same scholars for much of our understanding of Middle Eastern history, and, to an extent, there is no way of avoiding such an approach in order to establish any details about the numerous dynasties that ruled the Islamic world. For, at least until Ottoman

5 R.S.Humphreys, 'Taʾrīkh. II. Historical Writing' in *EI2*, X, pp. 271–2.

6 On Muslims' preoccupation with political legitimacy, see R.S.Humphreys, *Islamic History: a framework for inquiry*, London: I.B.Tauris, 1991, pp. 148–54; P.Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004, pp. 33–5, 212, 220–255.

7 C.Melville, 'From Adam to Abaqa: Qāḍī Baiḍāwī's rearrangement of history. Part I', *Studia Iranica* 30(2001), pp. 76–7, 83–4.

8 J.S.Meisami, 'Rulers and the writing of history' in B.Gruendler and L.Marlow (eds), *Writers and Rulers: perspectives on their relationship from Abbasid to Safavid times*, Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2004, p. 88.

times, we generally lack the alternative sources of information at the disposal of historians of the mediaeval West, such as legal, fiscal and parliamentary archives. Equally, our knowledge of the archaeology of the mediaeval Middle East is patchy at best, and often non-existent, although this is at least a situation it might in theory be possible to remedy partially. Numismatics and epigraphy can be of much use to historians but they are rarely entirely satisfactory alone. So, in general, there is no way the historian of the Islamic world can avoid reliance on its historiographical tradition, making it all the more important to develop our understanding of its nature and genesis.

Not all Islamic historiography has been equally neglected. Turkish has probably suffered the worst, and Arabic fared the best, although there are notable exceptions to these generalizations on both sides. The student of Persian historiography is comparatively fortunate in that a relatively large proportion of texts has been published, even if often inadequately. Yet only with the research of Kenneth Luther and Marilyn Waldman in the late twentieth century have these works been studied as more than mines of information.[9] The publication of Julie Scott Meisami's *Persian Historiography* presented the first (and to date, only) general study of Persian historical writing that attempts to understand the genre's literary features, and as such marks a milestone in scholarship.[10] Yet Meisami had to contend with a lack of basic research on many of the texts she discussed, and there is likely to be little progress in our understanding until this deficiency starts to be rectified. This book has been written in the hope that, whatever its own inadequacies, it may serve as a contribution towards filling this void, through a detailed study of the earliest and most popular work of Persian historical writing, Bal'amī's *Tārīkhnāma*.

### Problems in the study of the *Tārīkhnāma*

No other Persian historical work is preserved as many manuscripts as the *Tārīkhnāma*, with at least 160 extant copies. Its nearest competitor is Mustawfī's eighth/fourteenth century *Tārīkh-i Guzīda*, of which nearly 100 manuscripts are known to survive.[11] There

9 K.Luther, 'Islamic rhetoric and the Persian historians, 1000–1300 A.D.' in J.A.Bellamy (ed.) *Studies in Near Eastern Culture and History in Memory of Ernest T.Abdel-Massih*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1990; M.R.Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative: a case study in Perso-Islamicate historiography*, Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1980. A partial exception to this is provided by the Iranian scholar M.T.Bahār's *Sabk-shināsī: tārīkh-i tavvaṭur-i nathr-i Fārsī*, Tehran, Mu'assasa-i Intishārāt-i Amīr Kabīr, 2535, which examined the development of Persian prose style, including many histories. Bahār, however, was interested not in these works as histories or as literature, but as specimens of Persian prose.

10 J.S.Meisami, *Persian Historiography Down to the End of the Twelfth Century*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999.

11 See the figures given in Melville, 'From Adam to Abaqa', p. 73, Table 1. All numbers of extant manuscripts must be regarded as approximate, as additional copies may survive in uncatalogued collections.

are even more extant copies of it than any Arabic historical work with the exception of Maqrīzī's *Kitāb al-Khiṭaṭ*, of which 170 manuscripts exist.[12] Yet despite its antiquity

and popularity, few scholars have devoted much attention to the *Tārīkhnāma*. In the nineteenth century, the complete text of Ṭabarī's original was thought to have been lost, so some interest was shown in Balʿamī's *Tārīkhnāma* as a way of recovering the contents of the Arabic. Two French translations of Balʿamī resulted,[13] but few further studies were produced after the publication in Leiden of the Arabic text of the *Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa-'l-Mulūk* (1879–1901), reconstructed from manuscripts scattered around the world by a team of editors led by the renowned Dutch Arabist de Goeje. Yet, as Elton Daniel has said, calling Balʿamī's work a translation was 'one of the most unfortunate titles ever to be given to a book'.[14] For in fact Balʿamī's work differs greatly from Ṭabarī's in both form and contents, as the translator himself makes clear in his preface to the work:

> God Exalted made the Amir al-Sayyid al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Abū Ṣāliḥ Manṣūr b. Nūḥ …examine this book and he persisted in studying it until he had acquired the paradigms [of behaviour] gathered in it. His exalted command went out and it did not remain [long] on the tongue of his confidant and counselor Fā'iq al-Khāṣṣa who, in the year 352, ordered the translation of this book by Muḥammad b. Jarīr Ṭabarī, the author of the *Tafsīr*, known as the book of history comprising information about the ancients and reports about them. [He ordered] the text of the reports *(akhbār)* to be abbreviated, omitting the lists of authorities *(isnāds)*, and pruning the repetitions and long-winded recounting of stories of every prophet and king and the detail of every report in the correct form. So I translated it into Darī Persian that the intellects (*'ilm*) of the populace and the authorities might share in reading it and knowledge of it and that it might be easy for anyone who examines it. For God (great and glorious is He) has said, *' We have not sent a prophet save with the tongue of his people'* (Q. 14.4) and he has given every people prophets with their [own] tongue and language.[15]

12 A.F.Sayyid, 'Early methods of book composition: al-Maqrīzī's draft of the *Kitāb al-Khiṭaṭ*,' in Y.Dutton (ed.), *The Codicology of Islamic Manuscripts: proceedings of the second conference of Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 4–5 December 1993,* London: al-Furqān Heritage Foundation, 1995, p. 95.

13 [Balʿamī], *Chronique d'Abou Djafar Mohammed Tabari* (tr. L.Dubeux), Paris: Oriental Translation Fund, 1836 (first volume only published); ibid, *Chronique de Abou Djafar Mohammed ben Jarir ben Yazid Tabari* (tr. H.Zotenberg), Paris: Oriental Translation Fund, 1867–74.

14 E.Daniel, 'Manuscripts and editions of Balʿamī's *Tarjamah-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*', *JRAS* 3rd series, 2(1990), p. 283.

15 *Tārīkhnāma-i Ṭabarī gardānīda-i mansūb bi-Balʿamī*, M.Rawshan (ed.), Tehran: Soroush, 1378/1999, I, p. 2.

Bal'amī's preface mentions several important points that will be explored in detail in this book. The translation of Ṭabarī was a matter of singular importance for the Sāmānid state, one of the most powerful and extensive Muslim states of the fourth/tenth century. It was commissioned by the ruler himself, and the two most important political figures in the realm were involved: Fā'iq, the military strongman who held great political power, and Bal'amī, the Sāmānid vizier. It also makes it clear that Bal'amī's version was never intended to be an exact, word-for-word translation of Ṭabarī, but rather an abridgement and adaptation. Indeed, it seems that at the time Bal'amī was writing, the term *tarjuma*, usually understood to mean 'translation', in fact implied commenting on a work rather than simply conveying the meaning from one language to another.[16] Furthermore, the justification for this 'translation' was not merely the need to provide an accessible Persian version of Ṭabarī's history, but is bolstered by the citation of the Qur'ānic verse: the implication is that the translation is in fact a religious obligation. However, Bal'amī's preface also glosses over certain important characteristics of his book. Accounts mentioned in Ṭabarī are missing in Bal'amī, while the translator often appears to have added material from elsewhere to supplement Ṭabarī's accounts. In other words, it is not so much a translation as a new, independent work which drew on the prestige of Ṭabarī's name to assert its own authoritative nature, or, as Daniel puts it, 'the Tabari translations hijacked Tabari's name and reputation in order to put them at the service of an agenda all their own'.[17]

However, modern scholars have tended—understandably—to take Bal'amī at his word and assume his work is nothing more than an abridged Persian version of the much more reliable and interesting Arabic original. This dismissal of the *Tārīkhnāma* as a mere translation is the main reason it has received little attention. Another, however, perhaps lies in the work itself. Like many works of Islamic literature, the textual tradition of the *Tārīkhnāma* is immensely complicated, with wide differences between the texts of the various manuscripts. A passage in one manuscript often is radically different in another, or sometimes entirely absent. No manuscripts from Bal'amī's own time exist, and it is clear that many of these variants are due to the activities of later copyists who would adapt the text to suit the tastes and interests of their own day. Yet it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify exactly where and how the text has been altered. In other words, reconstructing the original text that Bal'amī wrote is fraught with difficulties, and we will probably never succeed in doing so entirely. This problem has doubtless discouraged the study of the work. With the notable exception of Elton Daniel, scholars who have used the *Tārīkhnāma* for one reason or another—usually to extract historical information

16 A.Azarnouche, 'La formation du persan sous l'influence de la langue arabe au iv$^{e}$/x$^{e}$ siècle' in M.Szuppe (ed.), *Iran: Questions et Connaissances*, II: *Périodes médiévale et moderne*, Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, 2002 (*Cahiers de Studia Iranica* 26), p. 13.

17 E.Daniel, 'The Samanid "Translations" of Tabari', in H.Kennedy (ed.), *Al-Ṭabarī: a medieval Muslim historian and his work*, Princeton: Darwin Press, forthcoming, [p. 11].

not found in other sources—have tended to ignore these textual problems. However, without understanding how and why the text has come to exist in its current forms, it is difficult to come to any conclusions about its contents.

Inevitably, then, much of this book is preoccupied the processes by which the *Tārīkhnāma* has been transmitted. This is necessary not just for our understanding of Balʿamī'swork, but of Islamic historiography and indeed literature more generally. Numerous texts exhibit similar problems to the *Tārīkhnāma*. To name just two examples from historiography, in Persian, Bayḍāwī's *Niẓām al-Tawārīkh*, mentioned above, exists in numerous manuscripts which cannot easily be related to one another;[18] in Arabic, the famous biography of the Prophet by Ibn Isḥāq exists in several versions which appear to have very little in common indeed. Only rarely have scholars paid much attention to the textual problems of these works. Published editions often only reflect the text of one or a few manuscripts chosen almost arbitrarily by their editors. The recent edition of the *Tārīkhnāma* by Muḥammad Rawshan itself is a case in point. It is based on an early eighth/fourteenth century manuscript (London, RAS, Persian 22) which shows clear signs of sectarian tampering: pro-Shīʿite passages are added, and Sunnī ones doctored or omitted. Rawshan was aware that RAS, Persian 22 suffered from some deficiencies, and so he added missing passages from other manuscripts. The result is an ahistorical text that never existed until the late twentieth century in Rawshan's own edition, exhibiting an odd mixture of Shīʿite and Sunnī biases.

I do not pretend that all the problems presented by the textual tradition of such works are soluble easily or even at all. Where the present book differs from many others is that instead of wishing away these problems, it highlights them, in the belief that acknowledging the textual difficulties of such works is at least as important as studying them from the point of view of literary or intellectual history. To seek to 'mine' a text for information without seeking to understand it in the context of the cultural, literary and political currents that shaped it is doubtless foolhardy, as Meisami suggests.[19] Yet it is equally dangerous to study a text while ignoring the various phenomena that account for the form or forms it currently possesses. This book is based on an examination of some 30 Persian manuscripts of the *Tārīkhnāma,* in addition to a good many more of its various Arabic and Turkish versions. While by no means comprehensive—the number of manuscripts is too great to allow this—this manuscript-based approach to the text does, I hope, shed light on many obscure areas both of the *Tārīkhnāma* and of processes of textual transmission in general. We are also fortunate that an early Arabic translation of the *Tārīkhnāma* exists, which appears to preserve a much older and more conservative version of the text than the Persian manuscripts do, against which they can be checked. Whilst this does not allow us to reconstruct Balʿamī'soriginal word-for-word, it does provide a considerably better basis for understanding the genesis of the text than has been hitherto available.

18 Melville, 'From Adam to Abaqa', p. 69.

19 Meisami, *Persian Historiography,* pp. 3–5, 11–12.

Inevitably, scholars are dependent on the current state of research on the transmission of the vast majority of texts they consult. For instance, in this book I cite numerous editions of Arabic and Persian works which doubtless often present very simplistic versions of their texts. To check the manuscript tradition of each would have been an enormous task, which probably would have yielded only fairly scant results, as material from such editions only accounts for a relatively small part of the argument of this book. Furthermore, while many works have very unstable textual traditions, by no means all do.[20] An urgent requirement for scholarship is a study of which texts were more susceptible to variation than others and why this was the case.

The discussion of the reception of the *Tārīkhnāma* in Chapter 5 suggests some ways in which this problem can be studied, at least with regard to this text.

As well as analysing the textual history of the *Tārīkhnāma*, its form and contents, and examining Bal'amī's aims in writing it, I consider the reception of the work by subsequent generations. Ample evidence for this exists, both in the Persian manuscripts themselves and in the numerous translations of the *Tārīkhnāma* into other languages, most notably Turkish. In order to understand the work's textual history, it is necessary to appreciate how later Muslims saw the *Tārīkhnāma* and what meaning it had for them.[21] In part, it was precisely because the work was so popular and so readily adaptable to the interests of numerous different groups as disparate as Ṣūfis and kings that its text was often altered so radically. Bal'amī's *Tārīkhnāma*, it seems, had something to offer everyone, and everyone saw fit to adapt to it to suit their own circumstances.

Before proceeding to consider the *Tārīkhnāma* we must say a few words about Ṭabarī himself and his original Arabic *Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa-'l-Mulūk*. Bal'amī's *Tārīkhnāma* may in reality be an independent work, but its inspiration was clearly Ṭabarī's *History*. We must therefore consider why the reputation of Ṭabarī and his *History* was so great that Bal'amī wished to 'hijack' them, in Daniel's phrase, and the tradition of historical writing from which the Arabic *History* emerged.

20 For example, Morton's recent edition of Nīshāpūrī's *Saljūqnāma* presents a text which existed in two different yet closely related redactions, yet appears to have been preserved comparatively conservatively. As a result Morton has been able to produce a convincing reconstruction of the text through using a stemmatic approach. See Ẓahīr al-Dīn Nishāpūrī, *The* Saljūqnāma: *a critical edition making use of the unique manuscript in the Library of the Royal Asiatic Society*, A.H.Morton (ed.), np: Gibb Memorial Series, 2004, Introduction, pp. 37–44.

21 The codicology of Islamic manuscripts as sources for works' reception has attracted little scholarly attention. For a recent example from the West of how productive this approach may be, see R.McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

22 The literature is extensive. For a convenient introduction, see Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, pp. 18–30.

## Ṭabarī and the place of *The History of Prophets* and *Kings* in Arabic historiography

The origins and early development of historical writing in Arabic has been more thoroughly researched than any other problem in Islamic historiography. Yet, despite the scholarly attention it has attracted, it remains a controversial and poorly understood subject.[22] It seems that its origins are closely connected to those of *ḥadīth*, although distinct. *Ḥadīth* came into circulation out of a feeling among Muslims that the life of the Prophet offered a model to be emulated, while historical reports *(akhbār)* sought to explain the origins of the *umma* and its early disputes. As a result, early Arabic historiography has much in common with *ḥadīth*, although historical reports came to be called *akhbār* (sing, *khabar*). In both *ḥadīth* and *akhbār,* each account is given an *isnād,* a list of authorities for the report stretching back to the original source, usually a witness to the event or a participant in it. Although historiography never developed the elaborate systems of categorizing the reliability of reports and their transmitters that *ḥadīth* did, it was still normal practice to cite multiple reports if there were variations in the text or *isnād*. *Akhbārīs* and *muḥaddiths* (transmitters of *akhbār* and *ḥadīth* respectively) usually came from the same background, being pious scholars, not part of the administrative and literary elite. Nonetheless, early historians were regarded with some suspicion by *muḥaddiths,* as their application of *ḥadīth* techniques such as *isnāds* tended to be much less rigorous than in *ḥadīth* itself.

In the early ʿAbbāsid period, the state started to take an interest in historical writing, and the Caliph Manṣūr (d. 158/775) commissioned works such as Ibn Isḥāqʾs universal history, of which only the parts dealing with the Prophet's life *(Sīra)* survive. The ʿAbbāsids had come to power in 132/750 in a revolution that wiped out the Umayyad dynasty, but the new rulers faced severe doubts as to their credibility among important sections of society.[23] As Chase Robinson puts it, '[p]atronizing history…held out to the Abbasids the prospect of establishing their cultural credentials and legitimizing the violence that brought them to power'.[24] Ibn Isḥāqʾs work marks the start of a growing trend of composing universal histories which subsumed earlier monographs on individual themes in Islamic history such as, say, the Prophet's *maghāzī* (wars on unbelievers). Despite the state's patronage of historiography, there remained among the traditionalists who were its authors an abiding suspicion of the caliphs and the state.[25]

23 On the ʿAbbāsidsʾ legitimacy problem, see Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought,* pp. 89–94.

24 Robinson, *Islamic Historiography,* p. 26.

25 Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought,* pp. 138–9.

Arabic historiography did not become an unambiguous tool of state propaganda until the fourth/tenth century, when Ṣābi' was obliged to compose a history in praise of the Būyid dynasty, the *Kitāb al-Tājī*. Although according to legend it was famously described by its author as 'falsehoods', it seems to have inspired 'Utbī's *Ta'rīkh al-Yamīnī*, a fifth/eleventh century work which was held up as a model for much subsequent Arabic and Persian literature.[26]

During the third/ninth century, history and *ḥadīth* began to part company, and writers like Dīnawarī and Ya'qūbī dropped the apparatus of *isnāds* and variant accounts, creating a smooth and coherent narratives. In the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries well-known historians, in particular Mas'ūdī in his *Murūj al-Dhahab* and Miskawayh in the *Tajārib al-Umam*, sought to break away completely from *akhbār*-based history. Both of these stress the importance of reason for the study of history, but this was to prove a blind alley, for they had few imitators. Subsequent historians tended to omit *isnāds* and variant accounts, but their inspiration was the greatest and last of the *akhbār*-based compilations, Ṭabarī's *History of Prophets and Kings*, from which they often copied large passages and which others would often cite as a source even if they had not used any material from it, so great did its fame become.

Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī was born in 224 or 225/839 in the town of Āmul on the Caspian Sea in the province of Ṭabaristān, from which his name derives.[27] He was of Iranian stock, and Persian (or the local dialect of it) was his first language. His family owned property from which they derived sufficient income to allow Ṭabarī to pursue scholarly interests. He soon left Ṭabaristān for the intellectual centres of the Muslim world, studying in Rayy, Kūfa, Baṣra, Egypt and Syria, although he eventually settled in Baghdad. His studies were those typical of a mediaeval Muslim scholar, concentrating in particular on *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*, jurisprudence. His travels were mainly inspired by the desire to study these subjects with the most reputable authorities, wherever they may be. Such a course was followed by the numerous scholars who took to heart the Prophet's injunction to 'seek knowledge, though it be in China'.

Ṭabarī's great learning won him a substantial following in Baghdad, where a law school *(madhhab)*, the Jarīriyya, took its name from him. Baghdād in this period was riven with disputes between various Shī'ite and Sunnī groups which the declining 'Abbāsid Caliphate was unable to control. Inevitably, Ṭabarī was a controversial figure to some. Although he is usually associated with Sunnism, he was accused of Shī'ism,

26 W.Madelung, 'Abū Isḥāq al-Ṣābī on the Alids of Ṭabaristān and Gīlān', *JNES* 26/i (1967), pp. 17–21.

27 For Ṭabarī's career, I am reliant on Rosenthal in Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, I: *General Introduction and From Creation to the Flood* (tr. F.Rosenthal), Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989, pp. 5–134, to which refer for further details.

almost certainly without good cause.[28] He also aroused the ire of the Ḥanbalīs, populist Sunnī traditionalists who asserted that law and religious doctrine should be derived from the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* alone. Despite their allegations against him, he unquestionably regarded not just Ḥanbalism but also the various forms of Shī'ism with intense suspicion. Indeed, on a return visit to Ṭabaristān he is said to have been nearly killed by his compatriots as result of his defence of the first two Caliphs from Shī'ī attacks. So concerned was he about the rise of heterodoxy, especially Khārijism and Mu'tazilism, in his native land, that he wrote an essay to try to counter it. He died in Baghdad in 310/923.

Ṭabarī wrote numerous works on a variety of areas of the religious sciences, although the exact number and their titles remains unclear. However, his fame, immense even during his lifetime, rests on two enormous works, his *Tafsīr* or Commentary on the Qur'ān, and the *Ta'rīkh*, his great chronicle. In the *Tafsīr*, Ṭabarī provides a detailed analysis of Qur'ānic verses, supporting his arguments with *ḥadīth*, the views of other scholars, and analogy. While numerous different interpretations are discussed, Ṭabarī always specifically rejects erroneous ones, and much of the work forms a polemic against them. The reader is always told exactly what to think, although Ṭabarī's views were often controversial.[29]

The *History* at first appears very different. The work is built up of reports, *akhbār*, of historical events, and as in the *Tafsīr*, each of these is provided with an *isnād*. However, the reader is rarely told Ṭabarī's view on the accuracy of each report. Rather, readers were expected to judge the reliability of a report from the *isnād*, so if an event was reported solely by a transmitter or authority known for his unreliability, it would be regarded with scepticism. Yet in practice Ṭabarī seems to have arranged the reports carefully, giving some more prominence than others, to promote a certain version of history.[30] Regrettably, few detailed analyses of the *History* have been produced hitherto, so it is difficult to draw general conclusions as to the exact nature of Ṭabarī's agenda. However, it is clear that, as one would expect, it was strongly pro-Sunnī and hostile to Shī'ism.

28 See C.Gilliot, *Exégèse, Langue et Théologie en Islam: l'exégèse coranique de Tabari (m. 311/923)*, Paris: J.Vrin, 1990, pp. 54–5.

29 T.Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 75.

30 For examples of this, see M.Hodgson, 'Two pre-modern Muslim historians: pitfalls and opportunities in presenting them to moderns' in J.Nef (ed.), *Towards World Community*, The Hague: W.Junk, 1968, pp. 53–68; ibid, *The Venture of Islam: conscience and history in a world civilization*, I: *The Classical Age of Islam*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974, pp. 352–357; R.S.Humphreys, 'Qur'ānic myth and narrative structure in early Islamic historiography' in F.M.Clover and R.S.Humphreys (eds), *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, pp. 271–290.

The scope of the *History of Prophets and Kings* is vast. Covering history from Creation down to the author's own times, it remains to this day an essential source for Middle Eastern history, for topics as diverse as the Sāsānian Empire in Iran (224–651), the life of the Prophet Muḥammad (d. 11/632), the early Islamic conquests, and the first great Muslim Empires, the Umayyads (41/661–132/750) and the ʿAbbāsids (132/750–656/1258). Although the *History* is often referred to as a work of universal history, a caveat is in order. Ṭabarī was not interested in writing a general history of the world, and this is reflected in some of the omissions from his work. For instance, he discusses the pre-Islamic history of Iran and Yemen in detail, while virtually ignoring that of Greece and Rome. In the Islamic period, his treatment of events in Iraq and Transoxiana is generally detailed, while those in Egypt and Syria are dismissed relatively briefly, even though he was personally acquainted with both these important areas of the Islamic world and had almost certainly never been to Central Asia. Issues of concern to many modern historians are neglected by him, such as taxation, commerce, settlement or agriculture. As Donner argues, the 'master narrative' underlying Ṭabarī's chronicle aimed to explain how the *umma* had reached its contemporary situation and to affirm that it was 'the community of the true faith'.[31]

Ṭabarī used a variety of sources, some oral, some written. Traditionally in Islamic culture orally transmitted materials were regarded as more reliable, but Ṭabarī unquestionably incorporated into the *History* the written works of earlier Muslim historians. These works have rarely survived in their original form, and are often attested only in the *History*. However, in the rare instances where the original source has been preserved intact and we can compare it with Ṭabarī's version, it is clear that he does not quote it verbatim. In particular, he had a tendency to divide long narratives into shorter passages prefaced by *isnāds*, indicating his readiness to re-mould his sources to suit not just his historical outlook but also historical methodology. Both outlook and methodology demanded a *ḥadīth*-centred narrative, in keeping with what Robinson describes as his 'emphatically traditionalist' approach.[32]

So Ṭabarī's *History* is by no means all it appears. It is less comprehensive and its citation of authorities is less reliable than it seems at first, and it indubitably reflects some of Ṭabarī's own biases. Yet it succeeds in its intention to provide what Donner describes as

> an organic historical explanation for the identity and role of the Muslim community in the third and fourth centuries AH. It explains how the community can see itself as the result of the application of God's guidance in human affairs. It shows how earlier communities, led by prophets with the same message as that revealed to Muḥammad, went astray, making the Muslims unique in their adherence to the true law, even though the earlier prophets and their communities can be seen as forerunners of

31 F.M.Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: the beginnings of Islamic historical writing*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998, p. 129.
32 Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, p. 36.

> Muḥammad and the Islamic community. At the same time, this recounting of predecessors who went astray serves (as it does in the Qur'ān) as a tacit warning to Muslims to be mindful of their own behavior, lest they too stray as a community from the true path.[33]

The *History* is, then, very far from being a simple narrative of historical facts—as discussed above, few pre-modern histories were. Rather, it is an intensely religious work with a clear moral purpose. This is why it can possess so many apparent deficiencies: ultimately they are irrelevant to Ṭabarī's intention in writing the work. Yet the *History* was nonetheless highly valued as a historical source, as is attested by its frequent citation by later authors. It does seem to have been seen as providing a moderate interpretation of the community's past, in line with the consensus of mainstream opinion, avoiding the extremes of Shī'ism or its more radical opponents.[34] This does not mean that it was free of biases, or was seen as such. On the contrary, Ṭabarī often suppresses reports of which he disapproves, such as pro-Shī'ite ones.[35] However, the numerous contradictory reports which make up the *History* usually ensure that the *appearance* although not the reality of impartiality is maintained, an effect which doubtless appealed to a Sunnī readership.

This apparently even-handed approach helped ensure the *History's* popularity and, indeed, its translation into Persian. Although it was by no means the first universal history in Arabic,[36] it was unquestionably the most influential, finding later imitators in the major historians Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/ 1200), Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1234) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), who often quote long passages from Ṭabarī's *History* virtually without amendment.[37] Nor was Ṭabarī's work seen only as a source of dry facts for historians, but also as a fount of moral precepts, as is illustrated by an anecdote recounted by Ibn al-Athīr. Maḥmūd of Ghazna (d. 421/1030), ruler of the Ghaznavid Empire which stretched over much of Afghanistan, Central Asia and Northern India, once chastised Majd al-Dawla, the Būyid ruler of Rayy, just after he had captured the city:

> 'Have you not read the *Shāhnāma*, which is the history of the Persians, and the *History* of Ṭabarī, which is the history of the Muslims?' said Maḥmūd.
>
> 'Yes,' replied Majd al-Dawla.
>
> 'Your conduct is not that of one who has.'[38]

33 Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, p. 130.

34 Ibid, p. 128, and Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, p. 36.

35 A.Tayob, 'Political theory in Ṭabarī and his contemporaries: deliberations on the first Caliph in Islam', *Journal for Islamic Studies* 18–19(1998–9), pp. 32–7.

36 The earliest surviving is the *Ta'rīkh* of Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ (d. c. 240/854).

37 B.Radtke, 'Towards a typology 'Abbasid universal chronicles', *Occasional Papers of the School of 'Abbasid Studies* 3(1990, publ. 1991), p. 14.

38 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī 'l-Ta'rīkh*, C.Tornberg (ed.), Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1386/1966, IX, pp. 371–2.

Even by the early fourth/tenth century, the *History* had acquired a tremendous reputation and was widely praised by contemporaries. It seems that a vast number of manuscripts of it were made—one report, doubtless exaggerated, claims that the Fāṭimid palace library contained 1,200 copies of it.[39] The great length of the *History* soon gave rise to demand for a shorter version, and as early as the fourth/tenth century, an Arabic abridgement was produced by a group headed by Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Hāshimī.[40]

Yet despite the *History's* fame in the mediaeval Islamic world, no single complete copy has survived intact, probably due to its great length, which made it expensive to copy and reduced its general appeal. The standard modern edition of the work in 16 volumes[41] is thus based on manuscripts of different sections of the work scattered across the world, from Fez to Oxford, Leiden to Istanbul. Miraculously, the nineteenth century editors managed to reconstruct virtually the entirety of the text. It is unknown when the Arabic original fell out of circulation; judging by the extant dated manuscripts, most of which date to the seventh/thirteenth century or before, it may well have started to decline in popularity around the time of the Mongol invasions.[42] Although a handful manuscripts of manuscripts of Bal'amī's *Tārīkhnāma* date to the seventh/thirteenth century or earlier, we only find substantial numbers of them from the eighth/fourteenth century onwards. Henceforth, Ṭabarī's famous *History* would be better known in the Islamic world in Bal'amī's version of it than in the original. Translations into other Islamic languages, such as Ottoman and Chaghatay Turkish, were made from the Persian rather than from the Arabic original. Above all, the vast number of manuscripts of the *Tārīkhnāma* copied everywhere between Istanbul and India for nearly a thousand years is a testament to the huge popularity of Bal'amī's version of Ṭabarī.

39 B.Shoshan, *The Poetics of Islamic Historiography: deconstructing Tabarī's* History, Leiden: Brill, 2004, pp. xxvi–xxvii.

40 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, G.Flugel (ed.), Leipzig: F.C.W.Vogel, 1871, I, p. 234.

41 Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa-'l-Mulūk (Annales)*, M.de Goeje et al. (ed.), Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901.

42 Thirteen of the dated manuscripts of Ṭabarī's History listed by F.Sezgin (*Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, Leiden: Brill, 1967, p. 326) are seventh/thirteenth century; in comparison only two are eighth/fourteenth century.

# 1
# Politics, religion and culture in the late Sāmānid state

The first great flowering of Persian literature in the fourth/tenth century that produced the *Tārīkhnāma* has usually been associated with a growth in patriotic feelings amongst the Iranian population that had been subjugated since the early Islamic conquests,[1] and it did coincide with the rise of rulers of Iranian origin. It was an age when the Caliphate, beset by internal disputes in Iraq, was increasingly obliged to devolve power to local dynasties. In the *mashriq*, as the eastern Islamic lands of Khurāsān and Transoxiana were known, these dynasties were usually ethnically Iranian, most notably the Ṭāhirids, the Ṣaffārids and the Sāmānids themselves.

Yet the renaissance of Persian language and literature in this period cannot be explained purely by reference to the ethnic origins of these rulers. Neither the Ṭāhirids nor the Ṣaffārids, for very different reasons, promoted Persian literature seriously, with the exception of a few fragments of verse composed as experiments at their courts. Indeed, the Ṭāhirids subsequently had a reputation for active hostility to Persian literature, while the illiterate early Ṣaffārids played only a small part in the Persian renaissance.[2] Only under the Sāmānids in Central Asia was Persian reborn after its virtual disappearance as a literary language with the Arab conquest of Iran.

Yet Sāmānid Transoxiana was not the most obvious home for this renaissance. Much Sāmānid territory, including Transoxiana, had never formed part of the pre-Islamic Iranian Sāsānian state. Traditionally, the predominant ethnic group in Transoxiana was the Soghdians, who spoke an Iranian language related to yet distinct from Persian. Soghdian was dying out by the fourth/tenth century, at least in urban areas, for the Sāmānid realm was populated by Arab settlers (who had soon lost their language) and Turks in addition to the Soghdians and other ethnically Iranian peoples. The great majority of the Sāmānid population—probably around 80 per cent—was Muslim.[3] Thus

1 J.Rypka, *A History of Iranian Literature*, Dordrecht: D.Reidel, 1968, pp. 139–42; A.J. Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1958, p. 18; S.Meskoob, *Iranian Nationality and the Persian Language*, Washington, DC: Mage, 1992, pp. 28–63.

2 See C.E.Bosworth, 'The Ṭāhirids and Persian literature', *Iran* 7(1969), pp. 103–6. On the Ṣaffārids and the Persian renaissance, see ibid, *The Saffarids of Sistan and the Maliks of Nimruz*, Costa Mesa: Mazda, 1994, pp. 172–180.

3 R.W.Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: an essay in quantative history*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979, p. 47.

Transoxiana was far from being a traditional centre of Persian culture, and indeed, it was not there but in western Iran, especially the province of Fārs, that Zoroastrian books in Pahlavī continued to be copied for the dwindling bands of believers. The territories of the minor Iranian rulers of the fourth/tenth century who did espouse pre-Islamic, Sāsānian tradition, mainly in the remote mountains of the Caspian region, were scarcely touched by the Persian literary renaissance in Central Asia.

Modern scholarship has not yet satisfactorily explained the circumstances of the rebirth of Persian literature. This chapter will examine the Sāmānid *milieu* in which the *Tārīkhnāma* was produced, arguing that the predominant cultural atmosphere was one of religious conservatism rather than Iranian national sentiment and that it is against this background that the Persian renaissance must be interpreted. We will also examine the religious and political environment of the times, for Bal'amī's translation of Ṭabarī is commonly seen as having originated as a political project as much as a literary one, and 'almost certainly constituted an effort to propagate a state-sanctioned, "official" ideology of Islamic history and dogma, presumably in defence of the Sāmānid regime'.[4]

## The Sāmānids: an overview

The Sāmānid dynasty had long been established in Central Asia. According to some sources, including Bal'amī, they traced their ancestry back to pre-Islamic times, claiming descent from the sixth-century Iranian general Bahrām Chūbīn.[5] They seem to have been local gentry, known as *dihqāns*, who sympathized with the Arab conquerors who brought Islam to Transoxiana in the first half of the second/eighth century.[6] Sāmān, the founder of the dynasty, is said to have been converted by the Arab governor of Khurāsān between 105–9/723–7, Asad b. 'Abdallāh al-Qushayrī, after whom he named his son Asad.[7] The Sāmānids then vanish from the historical record for a century, reappearing around 204/819, when, as a reward for their support of the 'Abbāsid Caliph Ma'mūn against a rebel, the four sons of Asad were each granted rule of a major Transoxianan city: Samarqand, Farghāna, Shāsh and Herāt.

The early Sāmānids acted as deputies of the 'Abbāsid Caliphate's hereditary governors of Khurāsān, the Ṭāhirids. In the second half of the third/ ninth century, Ṭāhirid authority collapsed before the expansion of the Ṣaffārids, a dynasty from the

4 E.Daniel, 'Manuscripts and editions of Bal'amī's *Tarjamah-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*', *JRAS* 3rd series, 2(1990), p. 286. See also J.S.Meisami, *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999, pp. 23–37.

5 *Tārīkhnāma-i Ṭabarī gardānīda-i mansūb bi-Bal'amī*, M.Rawshan (ed.), Tehran: Soroush, 1378/1999, p. 2, where the genealogy of Manṣūr b. Nūḥ is traced back to Bahrām Chūbīn.

6 On the *dihqāns*' identification with their Arab counterparts and their sympathies with the Arab governor Asad b. 'Abdallāh, see E.Daniel, *A Social and Political History of Khurasan under Abbasid Rule, 747–820*, Minneapolis: Iran-America Foundation, 1979, p. 22.

7 See Narshakhī, *History of Bukhara* (tr. R.Frye), Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1954, pp. 59–60, 76.

remote province of Sīstān newly arisen from humble origins.[8] Thwarting Ṣaffārid ambitions over Transoxiana, the Sāmānid governor of Samarqand, Naṣr b. Aḥmad b. Asad, sent his brother Ismā'īl to take control of Bukhārā in 260/874. The Sāmānids' position was recognized the following year by the Caliph, who officially invested them with the governorship of all Transoxiana. In 287/900, the crushing defeat of the Ṣaffārids by Ismā'īl, by now ruler in his own right since Naṣr's death, brought him caliphal investiture as amir of all Khurāsān. With a few exceptions, the Sāmānids used this title of amir (commander, governor) until the dynasty was extinguished at the end of the fourth/tenth century. In reality, they were independent rulers whose rule was legitimized by the Baghdad Caliphate but not constrained by it.

Contemporary outside observers found much to admire in the Sāmānid lands, as the enthusiastic reports of geographers such as Iṣṭakhrī, Muqaddasī and Ibn Ḥawqal indicate.[9] Admittedly, they seem to have been less impressed by the Sāmānid capital, Bukhārā, which was regularly described as filthy and overcrowded.[10] However, this did not detract from the esteem in which the dynasty was held by contemporaries and posterity which often held them up as model rulers. For example, the famous Saljūq vizier Niẓām al-Mulk described Sāmānid administrative practice as a model for the Saljūqs to emulate.[11] The Sāmānids' great prestige—which they retain to this day in Central Asia[12]—rested on their reputation for piety, learning and support for the ulema, the religious leaders.[13]

Prestige alone was not enough prevent political instability. Like most rulers of the time, the Sāmānids faced rebellious vassals and succession disputes, and they occupied an increasingly precarious position as the last major Sunni power in the central lands of the caliphate. The fourth/tenth century has often been called 'the Shī'ite century' as it witnessed the crystallization of Shī'ism into a recognizable form with its distinctive doctrines and *ḥadīth* collections. It was a golden age for Shī'ism politically too, and Shī'ite rulers seized power in much of the Islamic world. To the west of the Sāmānid state, the Shī'ite Būyids, also of Iranian origin, controlled much of Iran and Iraq, holding

8 On them see Bosworth, *History of the Saffarids of Sistan,* esp. pp. 108–134 for their defeat of the Ṭāhirids.

9 See W.L.Treadwell, 'The Political History of the Sāmānid State', unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford 1991, pp. 25–35 for a discussion of these authorities and the problems with them.

10 R.N.Frye, *Bukhara: the medieval achievement,* Costa Mesa: Mazda, 1997, p. 93; Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm fī Ma'rifat al-Aqālīm,* M.de Goeje (ed.), Leiden: Brill, 1906, p. 281.

11 E.g. Niẓām al-Mulk, *Siyar al-Mulūk/Siyāsatnāma,* H.Darke (ed.), Tehran: Bungāh-i Tarjuma va Nashr-i Kitāb, 1347, p. 141.

12 For example, the main square of the Tajik capital Dushanbe contains a large statue of Ismā'īl the Sāmānid.

13 See, for example, Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm,* p. 339.

captive the Caliph. Their moderate co-religionists, the Ḥamdānids, occupied Syria,[14] while the Fāṭimids, adherents to a radical branch of Shī'ism, Ismā'īlism,[15] used their bases in first North Africa, then Egypt, to promote missionary activity among non-Ismā'īlī Muslims (the *da'wa*), aiming to convert the rest of the Muslim world.[16]

To the north and east of Transoxiana were the pagan Turkish tribes of the steppe, although many of them had converted to Islam by the second half of the fourth/tenth century, thanks in part to the activities of missionaries supported by the Sāmānids.[17] The state's eastern border with the Turks proved an irresistible attraction for the *ghāzīs* or holy warriors who flocked to Transoxiana to do battle with the infidel in the first half of the fourth/ tenth century. Among them were many Ṣūfīs, for early Ṣūfism was militant and committed to holy war *(ghazw).*[18] This doubtless accounts for the swift spread of Ṣūfism in the *mashriq* and among the newly Muslim Turks. Among these converted Turks were the Qarakhānids, the dynasty that would eventually overthrow the Sāmānids and divide their lands with the Ghaznavids, another Turkish dynasty based at Ghazna in modern Afghanistan. Religious zeal was not the sole reason for the Sāmānids' promotion of *ghazw,* for it also provided a valuable source of the Turkish slaves that comprised much of their army. Trade between the Sāmānids and the steppe also doubtless played a large part in the conversion of the Turks.

The Sāmānid state also had to face internal problems. Pre-modern communications made it difficult for any central authority to exercise control directly over large territories. No state in the period could survive without making compromises with local strongmen. The Sāmānids, for instance, allowed the Muḥtājid dynasty to rule as their vassals in Chaghāniyān, while in the second half of the fourth/tenth century, the governorship of Khurāsān was usually controlled by the Sīmjūrid family of Turkish slave origin. In theory, the Sāmānid ruler retained the right to remove a vassal should the need arise; in reality the vassals were equally capable of removing the ruler and replacing him with another member of his family—among whom there was never a shortage of willing candidates. The Sāmānid amir was thus by no means an all-powerful autocrat. His power was limited not just by distant, overpowerful vassals, but by his court retinue itself.

14 At least until the crushing defeats inflicted on them by the Byzantines under Nicephorus in the late 960s.

15 The terms Qarmaṭī and Bāṭinī are often used in the primary sources as general terms for Ismā'īlīs, although properly Qarmaṭī should not refer to Fāṭimid or pro-Fāṭimid groups. The terms have been preserved in passages directly translated here, but otherwise Ismā'īlī is used throughout.

16 P.Walker, 'The Ismā'īlī Da'wa and the Fāṭimid Caliphate' in *The Cambridge History of Egypt,* I: *Islamic Egypt, 640–1517,* C.Petry (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 132–3.

17 J.Paul, *Herrscher, Gemeinwesen, Vermittler: Ostiran und Transoxanien in vormongolischer Zeit,* Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1996, pp. 103–117.

18 V.Danner, 'Arabic literature in Iran' in *CHI* IV, 582; J.Paul, *The State and the Military: the Samanid case,* Bloomington: Indiana University, 1994, p. 13.

19 The amir was Aḥmad b. Ismā'īl, killed 301/914, and among the officials were the vizier Muṣ'abī (d. 330/941) and the governor of Khurāsān Bakr b. Mālik (d. 345/956–7).

One ruler and several officials met their ends at the hands of the slave soldiers *(ghilmān)* who constituted much of the Sāmānid army.[19] One text describes the Turkish retinue at the Sāmānid court in the early fourth/tenth century as 'the lords of the kingdom' *(arbāb al-mamlaka).*[20]

The second half of the fourth/tenth century saw the Sāmānids' power diminishing. During the reign of Balʿamīʾsmaster, Manṣūr b. Nūḥ(350/ 961–365/976), the amir's power declined further at the expense of the military chiefs. External pressures also damaged the state. The Sāmānids were obliged to intervene in Sīstān to attempt to resolve a dispute between their nominal vassal Khalaf b. Aḥmadthe Ṣaffārīdand his treacherous relative Ṭāhirwho had seized power in 354/965 during Khalaf's absence. The dispute was to drag on into the reign of Manṣūr'ssuccessor Nūḥ.As the fifth/ eleventh century historian ʿUtbīcommented, 'this was the first of the weaknesses which afflicted this [the Sāmānid] state'.[21] The Sāmānids' Ilyāsid vassals also lost control of Kirmān to the Būyids in 357/967–8,[22] and the year 354/965 also saw an Ismāʿīlīrising in Herat.[23] Further south, Alptegīn and Sebüktegīn set up the state in Ghazna that was eventually to assist in the overthrow of the Sāmānids.

However, there are few reports of disturbances in Transoxiana itself, and there were no campaigns against recently converted steppe Turks.[24] Most power was now in the hands of the mamlūk Fāʾiq al-Khāṣṣawho held the governorships of Samarqand, Shāsh and Bukhārā.[25] Meanwhile, Khurāsān was ruled from Nīshāpūr by the Sīmjūrids. The mamlūks of Transoxiana and Khurāsān competed with each other for power, appointing and dismissing viziers at will. For most of Manṣūr'sreign, Abū ʿAlī Balʿamīand AbūJaʿfar ʿUtbīheld the office.

Although the Sāmānid state's periphery was unquestionably weak at this period, the vital lands of Khurāsān and Transoxiana appear to have been relatively calm, at least in comparison with the situation in earlier periods. For example, Naṣr II b. Aḥmad (301/914–331/943), ruler during what was widely remembered as the Sāmānid Golden Age, had faced several revolts from members of the Sāmānid family, losing control of his capital Bukhārā at one point.[26] Naṣr'sson and successor, Nūḥ,confronted similar

20 L.Treadwell, 'Ibn Ẓāfir al-Azdī's account of the murder of Aḥmad b. Ismāʿīl al-Sāmānīand the succession of his son Naṣr', in C.Hillenbrand (ed.), *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth,* II: *The Sultan's Turret: Studies in Persian and Turkish Culture,* Leiden: Brill, 2000, pp. 401, 410 (text, f. 122b).

21 ʿUtbī/Manīnī, *Sharḥ al-Yamīnī al-musammā bi-'l-Fatḥ al-Wahbī ʿalā Taʾrīkh Abī Naṣr al-ʿUtbī,*Cairo: np, 1286, I, p. 102.

22 Treadwell, 'Political History', p. 232. There was, however, some success for the Sāmānids against their rivals in 361/971–2 in reinstating an earlier treaty from ʿAbd al-Malik'sreign which stipulated the payment of tribute by the Būyids to the Sāmānids: see ibid, pp. 229–30.

23 Isfizārī, *Rawḍat al-Jannāt fī Awṣāf-i Madīnat-i Harāt,*S.Imām (ed.), Tehran: Intishārāt-i Bunyād-i Farhang-i Īrān, 1338, p. 386.

24 Treadwell, 'Political History', p. 233.

25 Ibid, p. 237. The numismatic evidence Treadwell presents suggests that he may have held at least some of these at the same time rather than successively.

26 Treadwell, 'Political History', p. 144.

problems with the rebellion of his uncle Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad in 335/946–7. Ibrāhīm's allies held out for three years and imposed a truce on Nūḥ in the end.[27] Compared with this, the reign of Manṣūr seems to have been fairly peaceful, despite the amir's loss of power to the military elite.[28]

Less powerful than the military strongmen, but nonetheless important, were the civilian bureaucrats (*kuttāb*, sing, *kātib*). A handful of families held the same positions in the bureaucracy from generation to generation, alternating with other members of the same tiny elite. The Jayhānī, ʿUtbī and Balʿamī families between them held control of the vizierate for much of the fourth/tenth century. Although this bureaucratic elite had lost much of its earlier power by the later part of the century, it remained culturally significant. Many members of it did not just patronize literature, but were authors in their own right. On a local level, power was often held by the ulema. The *dihqāns*, the landed gentry left over from pre-Islamic times, saw their power diminish under the Sāmānids, ironically in view the dynasty's origins. Agriculture was neglected as cities, especially Bukhārā, expanded, destroying the basis of the *dihqāns'* power. In the cities themselves, fierce, frequently violent, struggles for power took place between rival groups. This factionalism was known as *ʿaṣabiyya*. These groups frequently legitimized their existence by claiming to represent Islamic legal schools *(madhhabs)*, in particular Ḥanafīs and Shāfiʿīs, the two *madhhabs* of the *mashriq*.[29]

Society in Sāmānid Transoxiana, at least by the middle of the fourth/ tenth century, thus had more in common with that elsewhere in the Islamic world, in eastern Iran, Iraq or Syria, than it did with any pre-Islamic or ancient Iranian traditions. Of course, some local features did exist: a few Manichaeans could still be found in Samarqand and in several areas *Sapīd-Jāmagān*, a rather mysterious heretical group, still survived.[30] There were also some Nestorian Christian communities. Yet the most distinctive characteristic of Transoxiana compared to the Islamic lands to its west was its fervent adherence to Sunnism.

## Islam in the *mashriq*

After the Arab conquests, Khurāsān and Transoxiana embraced Islam far more swiftly and enthusiastically than other parts of Iran, although the process differed somewhat between the two regions. In Khurāsān, conversion was assisted by the large-scale Arab

27 Ibid, p. 212.

28 That is, if we can argue on the basis of the sources' silence.

29 Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm*, p. 336; R.W.Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur: a study in medieval Islamic social history*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972, pp. 28–46.

30 *Ḥudūd al-ʿĀlam min al-Mashriq ilā al-Maghrib*, M.Sutūda (ed.), Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1340, pp. 107 and 114. The *Sapīd Jāmagān* or 'Wearers of White' were the followers of 'the veiled Prophet', Muqannaʿ, who resisted Islam. For details see Narshakhī, *History*, pp. 75 and 147, n. 264.

colonization of the region, which was underway as early as 47/667.[31] Intermarriage encouraged the assimilation of Iranians and Arabs, and the latter soon adopted Persian as their spoken language. Although there were regularly frequent revolts by non-Muslims into ʿAbbāsid times, much of the population cooperated with Arab rule,[32] and by the mid-second/eighth century even the *dihqāns* of Khurāsān, initially the class most hostile to Muslim rule, had converted to Islam en masse.[33]

The conquest of Transoxiana was not completed until the middle of the second/eighth century. Despite the protracted nature of the conquest, Islam was soon firmly established in the region.[34] This was partly due to the immigration of Arabs from Khurāsān to Transoxiana, and half of Bukhārā was given over to Arab settlers.[35] The indigenous population also converted to Islam in large numbers, although the pace may have varied from place to place. As in Khurāsān local elites assisted the invaders, and the Arab campaigns in Transoxiana may even have been financed by the wealthy Soghdian merchants of Marv.[36]

The Umayyad government, fearful of a decrease in tax revenue, refused to recognize the converts, and continued to collect from them the non-Muslims' poll-tax, the *jizya*. The cause of the *mashriqī* converts was taken up by the Murji'a, a group that sought Muslim unity, arguing, contrary to the claims of the both the proto-Shīʿa and their opponents, that judgement on the Caliphs ʿAlī and ʿUthmān should be deferred before God. Known as the *Ahl al-ʿAdl wa-'l-Sunna* (the supporters of justice and prophetic tradition), arguing that every Muslim should speak out against injustice, it was only natural that they should assist the new Muslims of Transoxiana.[37] Murji'ite influence lingered on in the region long after the dispute over status of the converts had been resolved, and elements of it survived into Sāmānid times. The religious tract *al-Sawād al-Aʿẓam*, composed in Arabic at the command of the great amir Ismāʿīl b. Aḥmad and later translated into Persian, certainly reflects some Murji'ite beliefs.[38] Thus Murji'ism seems to have been a decisive factor in shaping the Sunnī,

31 Danner, 'Arabic literature', p. 485. The scale of the Arab settlement of Khurāsān has been questioned. See P.Pourshariati, 'Local histories of Khurāsān and the pattern of Arab settlement' *Studia Iranica* 27(1998), esp. pp. 42–7, 76–9.
32 Daniel, *Social and Political History*, pp. 19–20.
33 Ibid, p. 191.
34 W.Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, Albany, NY: Persian Heritage Foundation, 1988, pp. 13–4.
35 See Pourshariati, 'Local histories', pp. 57–61 for a discussion of Narshakhī's account of the settlement and Islamization of Bukhārā by the Arabs.
36 E.de la Vaissière, *Histoire des marchants sogdiens*, Paris: Collège de France, 2002, pp. 269–272, 283–6.
37 Madelung, *Religious Trends*, loc.cit.
38 Madelung, 'The early Murji'a in Khurāsān and Transoxiana and the spread of Ḥanafism', *Der Islam* 59(1982), p. 39.

traditionalist character of Transoxiana. One of the leading Murji'a was Abū Ḥanīfa, founder of the Ḥanafite law school; doubtless the prevalence of Ḥanafism in the *mashriq* can be explained partly by this Murji'ite connection.[39]

The Murji'ite insistence on the importance of the *sunna* was by no means unique to them—indeed, virtually every political or religious group in early Islamic society called for a return to the Prophetic *sunna*. The great importance that Muslims accorded the behaviour of the Prophet as a model for their lives and law meant that much effort was devoted to collecting traditions about this *sunna*. The traditionist (in the sense of being interested in traditions) culture of the Islamic world also led to it having a traditionalist outlook, in other words one that revered the lifetime of the Prophet and the early Caliphs as the golden age of the Islamic community.[40] *Ḥadīth* and a traditionalist perspective were the foundations of Islamic society, at least Sunnī Islamic society, and nowhere more so than in the *mashriq*.

Over the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, both Khurāsān and Transoxiana developed as the major centres of traditionism and traditionalism in the Islamic world, although in rather different ways. In Khurāsān, the impetus for this was not the status of converts, but rather the position of the *abnā'*, the Arab settlers who had colonized the region in such great numbers and had provided the backbone of the forces that overthrew the Umayyads, bringing the 'Abbāsids to power (132/750).[41] The status of the *abnā'* had been eroded by the third/ninth century, and they embraced the populist traditionalism of the Baghdadi preacher Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.[42] The vital importance of the *mashriq* for traditionism is reflected by the fact that five of the six canonical collections of Sunnī *ḥadīth* were compiled by easterners: Bukhārī (d. near Samarqand 256/869–70); Muslim b. Ḥajjāj al-Nayshābūrī (d. Nīshāpūr 261/874); Abū Dā'ūd al-Sijistānī (d. 275/888); al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892); al-Nisā'ī (d. 303/915).[43]

Scholars from the rest of the Islamic world flocked to the *mashriq* to gather *ḥadīth*. Likewise, easterners would regularly travel west not just to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, but also to seek out *ḥadīth* transmitters. Bal'amī himself may have travelled for just this purpose, and one famous easterner who certainly did was the Ṣaffārid ruler of Sīstān, Khalaf b. Aḥmad (r. 352/963–393/1003), who before his accession to the throne studied *ḥadīth* in Khurāsān and then in the central Islamic lands.[44] Interest in

39 Madelung, *Religious Trends*, p. 17.

40 On traditionism and traditionalism see C.F.Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 85–92.

41 Madelung (*Religious Trends*, p. 24) notes that the *abnā'* did not sympathize with the 'Abbāsid revolution's Shī'ite principles.

42 A.Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shī'ism: ḥadīth as discourse between Qumm and Baghdad*, Richmond: Curzon, 2000, pp. 2–3.

43 S.H.Nasr and M.Mutahhari, 'The religious sciences' in *CHI* IV, p. 471.

44 Bosworth, *History of the Saffarids of Sistan*, pp. 328–330.

*ḥadīth* was widespread in the fourth/tenth century, and not restricted to a particular learned class comparable to modern academics. Indeed, some early Sāmānid amirs were known as *muḥaddiths*, as was Abū ʿAlī Balʿamī's father, Abū ʾl-Faḍl.[45] The ulema were not a narrowly defined group, for anyone who transmitted *ḥadīth* might be considered, up to a point, one of them. Some people studied *ḥadīth* only for a limited proportion of their time, while others devoted much of their attention to it. As a result, as Mottahedeh has pointed out, some people might be considered ulema for some purposes, but not for others, and some might be recognized as ulema by some people but not by others.[46] Thus ulema often had another occupation as well as teaching *ḥadīth*, and many were what Mottahedeh describes as 'semi-professional' scholars.[47] For reasons of prestige, they usually identified themselves primarily as ulema. The esteem in which they were held meant that they could often act as the spokesmen of communities.[48] It was the ulema who had invited the Sāmānids to take control of Bukhārā in 260/874, and their withdrawal of support for the dynasty in 389/999 allowed the Qarakhānid Turks to seize the city.[49]

The Sāmānid *mashriq* was thus a devout society in which men of religion wielded much power. There were, of course, exceptions to the prevailing Sunnī orthodoxy: one of the Jayhānīs had a reputation as a freethinker, and may have been a Manichaean, and there were certainly Twelver Shīʿite communities too, although as a small minority their relations with the Sunnīs seem to have been unproblematic. Shīʿism in fourth/tenth century Transoxiana was propagated by a Sunnī convert, Muḥammad b. Masʿūd al-ʿAyyāshī, who taught both Sunnī and Shīʿite *ḥadīth* in Samarqand.[50] The increasing number of Shīʿite names such as

45 Samʿānī, *Kitāb al-Ansāb*, M. ʿAṭā (ed.), Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1419, I, p. 410; III, pp. 223–4.

46 R.Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an early Islamic society*, London: I.B.Tauris, 2001, p. 140.

47 Ibid, p. 142.

48 Paul, *Herrscher*, p. 243.

49 Paul has argued (*The State and the Military*, pp. 21–2) that the Sāmānids and the ulema were on bad terms after the reign of Ismāʿīl b. Aḥmad. His evidence for this is that the amirs no longer attended the funerals of ulema and read prayers over their graves as they had done in earlier times. However, it is much more likely that this was due to the Sāmānids' desire to create an atmosphere of dignity *(haybat)* befitting the new status their caliphal investiture gave them, as Narshakhī indicates (*History*, pp. 82, 87, and see also Paul, *The State and the Military*, p. 11, n. 11). Thaʿālibī says that Nūḥ b. Naṣr had studied *ḥadīth* and religion (P.Crone and L.Treadwell, 'A new text on Ismailism at the Samanid court' in C.F. Robinson (ed.), *Texts, Documents and Artefacts: Islamic studies in honour of D.S.Richards*, Leiden: Brill, 2003, p. 39), and we know that Abū ʿAlī Balʿamī carried the coffin of one eminent scholar (Samʿānī, *Kitāb al-Ansāb*, V, p. 163), which he presumably would not have done as vizier if there had been bad relations between the ulema and the government. The ulema's cooperation over the translations of Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* and *al-Sawād al-Aʿẓam*, discussed below, indicates that their relations with the Sāmānid dynasty remained healthy until the end.

50 Madelung, *Religious Trends*, pp. 84–5.

ʿAlī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn found in non-Shīʿite families in the period suggests there was a widespread sympathy for the family of ʿAlī which did not convert into acceptance of Shīʿism.[51] Indeed, the overwhelming impression from the sources is that in the late fourth/ tenth century Sunnī conservatism was becoming, if anything, more prevalent.[52] ʿĀmirī, a philosopher who tried to reconcile rationalism and traditionalism, seems to have been harassed for his views, and according to one contemporary, was forced to live the life of a fugitive because of them. He complained of the 'hatred for wisdom and fanaticism against the people of insight [philosophers] which pervades the hearts of the populace'.[53] Even the *dihqāns*, usually considered the guardians of Iranian tradition, now appear in the sources as *muḥaddiths*.[54] Especially in Khurāsān, a pietistic, ascetic group known as the Karrāmiyya that subsequently won the support of the ultra-conservative Sultan Maḥmūd of Ghazna was becoming increasingly popular among the poor.

There is one exception of great importance to this trend towards Sunnī conservatism: the infiltration of Sāmānid court itself by the Ismāʿīlīs, widely considered in Sunnī circles as the most dangerous heretics of the age. The sources indicate that this infiltration occurred twice, during the reign of Naṣr II b. Aḥmad and again under Manṣūr b. Nūḥ. Our sole source for the latter occasion alleges that Abū ʿAlī Balʿamī himself played a key role in trying to thwart the Ismāʿīlīs, and it has been argued that the composition of his *Tārīkhnāma* was motivated by the need to combat the threat of Ismāʿīlī heresy to the Sāmānid state.[55] For these reasons, we shall examine Ismāʿīlism in the Sāmānid period at some length.

## Manṣūr b. Nūḥ, Balʿamī and the Ismāʿīlīs

Ismāʿīlism is an offshoot of Shīʿism that holds that the rightful successor to the imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) was his son Ismāʿīl, who predeceased his father, while the Twelver Shīʿa recognize Mūsā al-Kāẓim as the seventh imām. Its early history is shrouded in obscurity, and it first appeared as a political force in the late third/ninth

51 Bulliet, *Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 14.

52 E.Rowson, 'The philosopher as littérateur: al-Tawḥīdī and his predecessors', *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaft* 6(1990), pp. 85–6, 91.

53 E.Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and its Fate: al-ʿĀmirī's* Kitāb al-Amad ʿalā l-Abad, New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1988, p. 25, citing ʿĀmirī, *al-Ibṣār wa-'l-Muḥṣar* (unpublished manuscript).

54 J.Paul, 'Histories of Samarqand', *Studio. Iranica* 22/i (1993), pp. 90–91.

55 See J.S.Meisami, 'Why write history in Persian? Historical writing in the Samanid period' in C.Hillenbrand (ed.), *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth*, II, pp. 366–7; E. Daniel, 'The Samanid "Translations" of Tabari', in H.Kennedy (ed.), *Al-Ṭabarī: a medieval Muslim historian and his work*, Princeton: Darwin Press, forthcoming, [p. 11].

century, based first around Kūfa and later in Syria. It was soon split by the claims of one of its *daʿīs*(missionaries), ʿUbaydallāh,who claimed to be a descendant of Ismāʿīl and the true imām himself. ʿUbaydallāh was able to establish himself in North Africa with Berber aid, founding the Fāṭimid dynasty, while his opponents led by Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ took control of much of the east coast of Arabia. These were the regions where Ismāʿīlīs held political power, but they were present throughout the Islamic world from the Maghreb to the *mashriq*.

The importance of Ismāʿīlism went far beyond than that of a heretical religious movement. It held an allure of mystery as its doctrines were only explained to initiates who had sworn an oath not to reveal them, and was also of great political importance. The *daʿwa* was backed by the powerful Fāṭimids,who devoted substantial resources to promoting Ismāʿīlism in unconverted lands, be they Sunnī or moderate Shīʿite. Transoxiana, despite its reputation as a bastion of orthodoxy, attracted the attention of the *daʿwa* no less than elsewhere, and it met with some success there. Many of those attracted to Ismāʿīlism were members of the élite[56] and two of the *dāʿīs* in Transoxiana, Muḥammad al-Nasafī and Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī,were major intellectual figures. By the mid-fourth/tenth century, Ismāʿīlīs managed to convert much of the Sāmānid court, including the amir Naṣr II b. Aḥmad.[57]

The confused and contradictory nature of the sources does not allow us to judge exactly what the reaction to Naṣr's conversion was during his lifetime. It seems that at the end of his reign, around the time he converted, he was faced with a rebellion by his son Nūḥ,which may have been connected to his Ismāʿīlism;on the other hand it may have nothing to do with it.[58] What is certain is that on Nūḥ's accession to throne in 331/943, an anti-Ismāʿīlī reaction set in. Nūḥ appointed the Ḥanafī scholar and Qāḍī of Bukhārā, Sulamī, as his vizier. It was an unprecedented appointment, and Sulamī turned out to be a disastrous administrator. However, as Treadwell suggests, the main reason for appointing him had been to publicly dissociate Nūḥ from the heretical activities of his father.[59] Nasafī himself, the *dāʿī* who had converted Naṣr,was executed along with his accomplice Ṣabbāgh in 333/944,[60] and the vizier Muṣʿabī,widely thought to be an Ismāʿīlī,was also killed. It is unclear whether or not there was a complete purge of all Ismāʿīlīs:the philosopher Avicenna's father was an Ismāʿīlī,yet

56 Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī, *al-Qand fī Dhikr ʿUlamāʾ Samarqand*, Y.al-Hādī (ed.), Tehran: Mīrāth-i Maktūb, 1378/1999, p. 203; Crone and Treadwell, 'A new text on Ismailism', p. 52.

57 For the most recent analysis of the Ismāʿīlī episode during the reign of Naṣr,see Crone and Treadwell, 'A new text on Ismailism', *passim*.

58 Ibid, p. 45–7

59 L.Treadwell, '*Shāhānshāh* and *al-Malik al-Muʾayyad*:the legitimation of power in Sāmānid and Būyid Iran' in F.Daftary and J.Meri (eds), *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: essays in honour of Wilferd Madelung*, London: I.B.Tauris, 2003, p. 319.

60 Crone and Treadwell, 'A new text on Ismailism', p. 44; see below.

was employed as an official at the court of Nūh II b. Manṣūr (r. 365/976–387/997).[61] Such Ismā'īlīs very probably kept their beliefs private, for as Treadwell says, after the conversion of Naṣr, fear of Ismā'īlism permeated the state and accusations of Ismā'īlism, even if unfounded, could affect even the most powerful members of the court.[62] Nonetheless, one source reports that Ismā'īlī influence returned during the reign of Manṣūr b. Nūḥ.

According to Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), writing in his *Siyāsatnāma* or book of advice for princes, there was a major Ismā'īlī conspiracy 15 years into Manṣūr's reign. In his account,[63] the *da'wa* masterminded a coup strongly reminiscent of that in Naṣr b. Aḥmad's reign. Again the target was the court, and some of the most senior figures of the Sāmānid state converted, such as the *ḥājib* (chamberlain) Manṣūr b. Bāyqarā, Abū 'Abdallāh Jayhānī and Abū Manṣūr b. 'Abd al-Razzāq, the governor of the important Khurāsānī town of Ṭūs. The *dā'īs* were Abū 'l-Faḍl Rangriz Bardījī[64] 'and another man, one eyed, called 'Atīq'.[65] Niẓām al-Mulk continues: 'This group was made up of those people who were connected to the work of the court and the *dīwān*, and running the kingdom was in their hands, but they gave succour to their fellow religionists in secret.'

The Ismā'īlīs of the court then conspired to rebel with the *Sapīd Jāmagān* of Farghāna, Khujand and Kāshān. Furthermore, they persuaded Manṣūr to imprison his vizier Abū 'Alī Bal'amī and Bektūzūn, the commander of the *ghilmān*. When Alptegīn, the *sipāhsālār* (military commander) of Khurāsān, heard of this and realized that most of the court had converted to Ismā'īlism, he rushed to Bukhārā to attempt to try to repair the damage and persuade Manṣūr that he had been duped. Ibn 'Abd al-Razzāq blocked his way, and sent a letter to Manṣūr b. Bāyqarā warning him that Alptegīn had come 'to ruin your work'. The Ismā'īlīs at the court therefore told the amir that Alptegīn had rebelled against him. Manṣūr responded by ordering Alptegīn's passage to be blocked by the removal of the ferry-boats on the Oxus which he had to cross to reach Bukhārā.

Alptegīn then wrote to Manṣūr warning him of the Ismā'īlī takeover, and assuring him of his loyalty. He added that he would withdraw to Balkh. He also wrote a letter to

61 Ibid, p. 48.

62 Treadwell, '*Shāhānshāh* and *al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad*', loc. cit.

63 Niẓām al-Mulk, *Siyar al-Mulūk*, pp. 299–305.

64 As is clear from the textual apparatus of Darke's edition (p. 299), there is no consensus among the manuscripts for the correct spelling of this name, and Crone and Treadwell transcribe it as Zangurzbardījī. I follow the spelling of Shi'ār's edition as this seems to fit best, as will be discussed below. See Niẓām al-Mulk, *Siyāsatnāma*, J. Shi'ār (ed.), Tehran: Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī va Farhangī, 1348, p. 268 (references, however, are to Darke's edition).

65 Niẓām al-Mulk, *Siyar al-Mulūk*, p. 299.

the chief Qāḍī of Bukhārā and to the ulema. Abū Aḥmad Marghazī, the chief Qāḍī, went to see Manṣūr, and finally persuaded him of the truth, telling him he had been taken in by Ismā'īlī lies as a result of his failure to spend enough time listening to the ulema, in contrast to his father, Nūḥ b. Naṣr. The next day, news of the rebellion of the *Sapīd Jāmagān* of Farghāna arrived, followed by news of an Ismā'īlī rebellion in Ṭāliqān. In gratitude for the warning, Manṣūr offered Abū Aḥmad the vizierate, but he turned it down. Bal'amī and Bektūzūn were reinstated, and a public disputation at court was devised as method of discrediting the Ismā'īlīs. The Ismā'īlīs' arguments were found to be contrary to *sharī'a*, and 'Atīq was sentenced to a hundred lashes and exile in Khwārazm, while Abū'l-Faḍl Rangriz escaped rather less lightly with a hundred lashes and death by drowning in the Oxus. Armies were then sent against Ṭāliqān and Farghāna, and the ruling élite of Manṣūr, Bektūzūn, Bal'amī and Abū Aḥmad devised ways to cleanse Khurāsān, Iraq and Transoxiana of Ismā'īlīs. They also decided that Alptegīn's absence in Ghazna was the cause of Ibn 'Abd al-Razzāq's excessive power, and sent Vushmgīr, one of the Sāmānids' Caspian vassals, against the latter.

This passage is extremely problematic, as Crone and Treadwell have observed.[66] It is unique to the *Siyāsatnāma*, and contains serious discrepancies with the facts as presented in virtually every other source. Firstly, it presents several major chronological difficulties as both Abū Manṣūr b. 'Abd al-Razzāq and Alptegīn died shortly after Manṣūr's accession, and Abū 'Abdallāh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Jayhānī was vizier, rather than Bal'amī, in the last year of his reign.[67] Bal'amī may have died in 36S/974,[68] again before the alleged revolt. As Daniel, Crone and Treadwell have argued, the only way of reconciling these differences is by dating the episode to the first year of Manṣūr b. Nūḥ's reign.[69] Crone and Treadwell have presented some strong arguments for dismissing Niẓām al-Mulk's account entirely, pointing out its close similarities in detail to the story of the Ismā'īlī conversion of Naṣr in the *Siyāsatnāma* and various other inconsistencies. I agree with them that Niẓām al-Mulk's account is not credible, and wish here to suggest some additional reasons why it should be dismissed.

66 Crone and Treadwell, 'A new account of Ismailism', pp. 48–52, which supersedes the discussion by Treadwell in 'Political History', pp. 200–5.

67 See Ibn Ẓāfir, *Akhbār al-Duwal al-Islāmiyya* in L.Treadwell, 'The account of the Samanid dynasty in Ibn Ẓāfir al-Azdī's *Akhbār al-Duwal al-Munqaṭi'a*', *Iran* 43(2005), pp. 146, 158, and Gardīzī, *Zayn al-Akhbār*, 'A. Ḥabībī (ed.), Tehran: Intishārāt-i Bunyād-i Farhang-i Īrān, 1347, p. 164.

68 Gardīzī, *Zayn al-Akhbār*, p. 163. This is however contradicted by 'Utbī/Manīnī, *Sharḥ al-Yamīnī*, I, p. 170.

69 Crone and Treadwell, 'A new account of Ismailism', p. 50.

In addition to the severe chronological problems posed by Niẓām al-Mulk's account, it is incredible that an event which resulted in substantial armies being dispatched over the Sāmānid domains and is clearly of such importance could be ignored by every single other source. It is harder still to imagine that these events could unfold without the participation of Fā'iq, the most important political figure in the Sāmānid state, yet Niẓām al-Mulk's account mentions him nowhere. The story even contradicts other passages in the *Siyāsatnāma*, such as the statement that Alptegīn left for Ghazna six years into Manṣūr's reign.[70] However, in evaluating Niẓām al-Mulk's account, one must bear in mind that although the *Siyāsatnāma* contains historical information, it is not a historical work.

Niẓām al-Mulk was deeply concerned by the malign effects of Ismā'īlism—rightly, given that he himself died by an Ismā'īlī assassin's knife—and the *Siyāsatnāma* was intended to provide the author's master, the Saljūq ruler Malikshāh, with useful advice and warnings. The story of the Ismā'īlīs of Manṣūr's reign fits into a book full of examples of their dangerous infiltration, such as that which occurred in Naṣr b. Aḥmad's reign. The depiction of Bal'amī and Bektūzūn as the two last good Muslims at the court, imprisoned by the Ismā'īlīs' wiles, is clearly intended to warn of the consequences of listening to bad advice: the ruler ends up isolated without his loyal advisers. Abū Aḥmad's speech to Manṣūr reiterates some of the author's favourite points, such as that the ruler must spend time with the ulema;[71] it is implied that the crisis is due to Manṣūr's failure to do this. It is more likely that the question of how Iraq should be cleansed of heretics would have been raised at the Saljūq court than the Sāmānid one, for the Sāmānids never even claimed to control Iraq. It also seems highly unlikely that Kāshān would have been in Sāmānid hands at this point.[72] The mention of Abū 'Abdallāh Jayhānī, if Abū 'Abdallāh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Jayhānī is meant, is curious indeed, for he was also employed as vizier by Nūḥ b. Manṣūr, whose hostility to heterodoxy is commemorated by the translation of the anti-heretical tract *al-Sawād al-A'ẓam* he commissioned. Furthermore, Niẓām al-Mulk had every reason to stress the dangers posed to the ruler by these heretics, for it seems that his master Malikshāh may too have dallied with Ismā'īlism.[73]

70 Niẓām al-Mulk, *Siyar al-Mulūk*, p. 146, where a very different account of Alptegīn's relations with Manṣūr is given.

71 See, for example, Niẓām al-Mulk, *Siyar al-Mulūk*, p. 79.

72 According to Ḍarrabī, *Mir'āt-i Qāsān yā Tārīkh-i Kāshān*, Ī.Afshār (ed.), Tehran: Mu'assasa-i Intishārāt-i Amīr Kabīr, 2536, p. 404, Kāshān always came under the governorate of Iṣfahān or Qumm, both of which were in Būyid hands at this date. See J.Sourdel-Thomine, 'Iṣfahān' in *EI2*, IV, pp. 97–107.

73 A.K.S.Lambton, *Continuity and Change in Medieval Persia: aspects of administrative, economic and social history, 11th–14th century*, Columbia: Biblioteca Persica, 1988, p. 237.

Niẓām al-Mulk also had to resolve a contradiction in his work, in that he frequently cited both the Sāmānids and the Ghaznavids as model dynasties, yet the latter had overthrown the former. By presenting Alptegīn as the ever-obedient servant of Manṣūr, whose exile to Balkh then Ghazna was imposed on himself by his refusal to compromise with heretics and by his loyalty to the Sāmānid state, Niẓām al-Mulk manages to shield the Ghaznavids from too many questions as to how and why they seized power. By implication, the blame both for the end of the Sāmānids and for Alptegīn's actions is shifted onto the Ismā'īlīs. In the words of one scholar, this passage in the *Siyāsatnāma* demonstrates 'how the historical facts were deliberately manipulated to align with the narrator's didactic message and legitimizing agenda'.[74]

It is, however, unlikely that Niẓām al-Mulk entirely invented this episode. We know that there was an Ismā'īlī rebellion in Herāt in 354/965,[75] and Ismā'īlī sentiment remained strong for long enough in Ṭāliqān for Alptegīn's successor in Ghazna, Sebüktegīn, to have been obliged to send an expedition against the town.[76] A clue as to the origin of the story is provided by a passage in Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī's (d. 537/1142–3) encyclopaedia of Samarqandī ulema, which mentions the execution of two Ismā'īlī leaders in 333/944–5. They are named as Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ḥamdūya al-Bazdawī, and his accomplice Muḥammad b. Sa'īd b. Mu'ādh al-Manādīlī al-Bukhārī, known as al-Ṣabbāgh.[77] The names of the *dā'īs* are different from both those in Niẓām al-Mulk's account and their punishment is different too.[78] Yet Ṣabbāgh means the same as Rangriz, 'dyer', the nickname of Niẓām al-Mulk's *dā'ī*, and Bazdawī could easily be a copyist's error for Bardījī, which would look very similar in Arabic script. While the evidence is too little and too confused to permit any firm conclusions to be drawn, it is quite possible that this is the incident to which Niẓām al-Mulk refers. It is true that he does give a separate account of the Ismā'īlī uprising in Naṣr's reign[79] to which Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī's account clearly refers, but it is not impossible that he took it upon himself to distort further facts which had already become confused by the passage

74 M.Simidchieva, 'Kingship and legitimacy as reflected in Niẓām al-Mulk's *Siyāsatnāma*, fifth/eleventh century', in B.Gruendler and L.Marlow (eds), *Writers and Rulers: perspectives on their relationship from Abbasid to Safavid times*, Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2004, p. 121.

75 See n. 23.

76 This was during the reign of Nūḥ b. Manṣūr. See Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, 'A. Ḥabībī (ed.), Tehran: Dunyā-yi Kitāb, 1363, I, p. 213.

77 Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī, *al-Qand fī Dhrikr 'Ulamā' Samarqand*, pp. 202–3.

78 Al-Bazdawī is the same as Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bardahī al-Nasafī, the *dā'ī* of Naṣr's court whose execution by Nūḥ is mentioned by Ibn al-Athīr sub anno 331. See Treadwell, 'Political History', p. 199, n. 56 and Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Ta'rīkh*, C.Tornberg (ed.), Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1966, VI, p. 293.

79 He also names the *dā'ī* correctly as Muḥammad Nakhshabī (i.e. Nasafī).

of a century to highlight his message of the dangers of Ismā'īlism. A dating to 333/944–5 would fit better with the presence of Abū 'Abdallāh Jayhānī if we assume that Niẓām al-Mulk meant Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Jayhānī. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, grandfather of the aforementioned Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, had served as vizier to Naṣr b. Aḥmad until his dismissal on charges of *zandaqa* (freethinking). He is therefore a much more likely candidate for involvement with heretical movements. However, if we accept this earlier date, the involvement of Bektūzūn, Ibn 'Abd al-Razzāq and Alptegīn becomes problematic, for none of them were significant figures at the time.

There is no evidence in any other source for the conversion of the court except during the reign of Naṣr b. Aḥmad. Other Ismā'īlī rebellions are recorded by other sources, while this much more significant event is ignored. This supports Treadwell and Crone's view that Niẓām al-Mulk's account must be rejected, although Ismā'īlism may have retained some importance in the Sāmānid domains after Naṣr b. Aḥmad's death with rebellions in Manṣūr's reign and beyond. For instance, Jūzjānī—a rather late source—records the execution of two senior officials in 'Abd al-Malik's reign on suspicion of Ismā'īlī sympathies.[80] Yet it is doubtful that Ismā'īlism was a significant force in the later Sāmānid period. As Walker notes, while the chief *dā'ī* of Naṣr's reign, Nasafī, was well known to contemporary Ismā'īlī and non-Ismā'īlī sources alike, his successor Abū Ya'qūb Sijistānī (whose dates are unknown but who was certainly active during Manṣūr b. Nūḥ's reign) is mentioned only rarely and fleetingly, despite Sijistānī's senior rank in the *da'wa*.[81] This suggests that if Ismā'īlism had not been totally destroyed as Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī records, it was certainly a much less prominent force in the *mashriq*.

## Bal'amī's life and career

With the exception of Niẓām al-Mulk's discredited account, we possess relatively little information about Bal'amī. His family, originally from the Arab tribe of Tamīm (or possibly their Persian clients), had migrated eastwards from the town of Bal'am in Anatolia,[82] and his father, Abū 'l-Faḍl Bal'amī, had served as vizier to

80 Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, p. 210.

81 P.Walker, *Early Philosophical Shī'ism: the Ismaili Neoplatonism of Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 16–19.

82 Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1995, I, p. 485, s.v. 'Bal'am'. Sam'ānī, *Kitāb al-Ansāb*, I, p. 410 also suggests the *nisba* may derive from Bal'amān, a town near Marv, but no other source appears to concur.

Ismā'īl b. Aḥmad and Naṣr II b. Aḥmad, although he seems to have ended his career in disgrace.[83] The fact that both father and son served as vizier and that both seem to have had literary interests has inevitably led to the occasional confusion of the pair in the sources. Sam'ānī (d. 562/1166–7) states that members of the family were still living in Bukhārā in his day.

It is unfortunate for our purposes that the sources are rather more interested in Abū 'l-Faḍl than his son. He was known as a *muḥaddith* and author, and his *Rescripts (Tawqī'āt)* was one of the classic works that Niẓamī 'Arūḍī recommends to scribes if they wish to become proficient in their profession.[84] Abū 'l-Faḍl was also a patron of the great Sāmānid poet Rūdakī, who composed panegyrics in his honour; at the command of Naṣr, he translated *Kalīla wa-Dimna* from Arabic into Persian for Rūdakī to versify.[85] The later scholar Mizzī records that one of Abu 'l-Faḍl's friends had been personally acquainted with the great *ḥadīth* scholar Bukhārī,[86] and doubtless the family had many such links, both direct and indirect, with the religious elite of Transoxiana.

When Abū 'Alī was born is unknown. His father is generally reported to have died in 329/940–1, although 325/936–7 is also cited. Some evidence indicates Abū 'Alī had travelled abroad, presumably in his youth. A reference in some versions of the *Tārīkhnāma* suggests he had been in Baghdād,[87] and some manuscripts mention a visit to Syria.[88] A verse by Khwārazmī indicates that he visited Herat as vizier.[89] I am not aware of any further evidence for his early life, but it is clear that he acquired an excellent knowledge of Arabic. This accomplishment was relatively common among the Bukhāran bureaucratic élite at this period, as the Transoxianan Arabic works anthologized by Tha'ālibī in the *Yatīmat al-Dahr* attest. It is likely that his travels to the central Islamic lands were for educational purposes, perhaps in particular to hear *ḥadīth* from prominent authorities, just as other easterners like Khalaf b. Aḥmad went westwards for similar reasons. Such a journey would be particularly appropriate for a young man whose father himself was a noted *muḥaddith*.

83 On the elder Bal'amī's career, see C.E.Bosworth, 'Bal'amī, Abu 'l-Fazl Moḥammad' in *EIr*, III, pp. 573–4. On his end, see Kirmānī, *Nasā'im al-asḥār min naẓā'im al-akhbār dar tārīkh-i vuzarā'*, J.Urmavī (ed.), Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1956, p. 35.

84 Niẓāmī 'Arūḍī, *Chahár Maqála (The Four Discourses)* (tr. E.G.Browne), London: JRAS, 1921, p. 25. Browne, ibid, loc. cit, n. 3, believed that Niẓāmī 'Arūḍī is referring to Abū 'Alī in this passage, but there is no evidence for this.

85 On Rūdakī and Abu 'l-Faḍl Bal'amī, see S.Nafīsī, *Muḥīṭ-i zindagī va aḥvāl va ash'ār-i Rūdakī*, Tehran: Mu'assasa-i Intishārāt-i Amīr Kabīr, 1382, pp. 314–9.

86 Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī Asmā' al-Rijāl*, B.'A. Ma'rūf (ed.), Beirut, Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1413/1992, XXIV, pp. 462–3.

87 *Tārīkhnāma*, III, p. 87: 'I saw a group of Shī'ites in Baghdad.' Ṭabarī does not include this passage.

88 Daniel, 'Manuscripts and editions', p. 284, n. 11; *Tārīkhnāma*, I, p. 243.

89 Ḥ. Ṣidqī, *Dīwān al-Khwārazmī ma'a dirāsa li-'aṣrihi wa-ḥayātihi wa-shi'rihi*, Tehran: Mīrāth-i Maktūb, 1378/1997, p. 30.

We do not know when Abū ʿAlī's political career started, although with his family background and education he would have been an obvious candidate for the state bureaucracy. He was serving as a vizier under ʿAbd al-Malik when the succession dispute of 350/961 occurred, and continued in office under Manṣūr. Gardīzī and Jūzjānī have rather hostile accounts of Balʿamī's role in Manṣūr's accession.[90] They claim that on ʿAbd al-Malik's death in Shawwal 350, Balʿamī, in his capacity as vizier and stooge in Bukhārā of Alptegīn, the Turkish *sipahsālār* (military commander) of Khurāsān, wrote to Alptegīn in Nīshāpūr asking him whether the late amir's son or brother should succeed. Alptegīn replied that it should be the son, but ʿAbd al-Malik's brother Manṣūr was enthroned by the palace retinue in Bukhārā before his reply could arrive. The Turk tried to approach Bukhārā to pledge his loyalty to the new ruler, who refused to received him. Alptegīn then fled to Ghazna and Abū Manṣūr b. ʿAbd al-Razzāq was appointed over Khurāsān in his place. Thus Gardīzī's account of Balʿamī's role in the succession to ʿAbd al-Malik portrays him as ineptly subservient to Alptegīn and out-manoeuvred by the palace retinue who made their own minds up about the succession without waiting for the views of either the *sipahsalār* or the vizier.

Despite ending up on the wrong side in the dispute over ʿAbd al-Malik's successor, Balʿamī remained in office as vizier at the start of Manṣūr b. Nūḥ's reign. It is doubtful how much real power he had, as politics was dominated by the mamlūk Fā'iq and Abū ʿAlī's name does not feature very prominently in historical accounts of the period. ʿUtbī says he briefly served as vizier under Nūḥ b. Manṣūr in 382/992 on the latter's recapture of Bukhārā from the Turkish occupier, the Qarakhānid Bughrākhān, but was unable to deal with the state's problems, specifically a lack of cash and a large number of refugees due to the fighting.[91] He was therefore replaced by ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUzayr, recalled to serve his second term as vizier. Only Niẓām al-Mulk has a high opinion of Abū ʿAlī, praising him for his orthodoxy, but, as I have discussed, this passage is not reliable.

We know too that Balʿamī was a patron of literature, particularly Arabic literature, and there are several references to him in Thaʿālibī's *Yatīmat al-Dahr*. The best known recipient of the vizier's largesse was Abū Bakr al-Khwārazmī, a relationship which eventually went sour. In addition to a few verses of panegyric on Balʿamī, fragments of some rather unflattering poems by Khwārazmī on the subject of his erstwhile patron survive, presumably composed after his flight from the Sāmānid court. There are also a

90 Gardīzī, *Zayn al-Akhbār*, p. 164; Jūzjānī, *Tabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, I, pp. 210–11.

91 ʿUtbī/Manīnī, *Sharḥ al-Yamīnī*, I, p. 170. This incident is also mentioned by Khvāndamīr, *Dastūr al-Vuzarā*, S.Nafīsī (ed.), Tehran: Iqbāl, 1317, p. 113. Jurbādhqānī, *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Yamīnī*, J. Shiʿār (ed.), Tehran: Bungāh-i Tarjuma va Nashr-i Kitāb, 1345, p. 95, is rather stronger in his condemnation of Balʿamī than ʿUtbī, calling him '*mutaḥayyir va mutaballid*, confused and idiotic'.

few extant letters from the littérateur to Balʿamī.[92] Sadly, none of these reveals anything but Khwārazmī's skill at rhyming prose. Khwārazmī appears to have left Bukhārā by 353/964 in disgust at his treatment there, and took refuge in Nīshāpūr where a local notable, Abū Naṣr b. ʿAlī al-Mīkālī, became his patron. Presumably the reason for his discontent in Bukhārā was that he felt insufficiently rewarded for his work, a common complaint amongst poets.[93] Nor would Khwārazmī have been alone in feeling slighted by Balʿamī's stinginess, for Thaʿālibī records several bitter verses on the subject by the poet Abū Manṣūr al-Būshanjī.[94] Particularly fraught were the vizier's relations with the satirist Laḥḥām, who wrote,

> Balʿamī's vizierate is a complete mess/
> He is like a lock attached to a pile of ruins.
> He respects neither saints/
> Nor notables or scribes….
> He is the most deserving man of the disaster/
> Of having his head on the gallows.[95]

Balʿamī was certainly not the only target of Laḥḥām, who does not seem to have been a particularly sympathetic individual—Thaʿālibī calls him 'a human devil'.[96] However, his invective against Balʿamī appears to have been one of his most famous works, and Thaʿālibī says 'it will last forever'.[97] As a result of complaints against the poet, the amir Manṣūr ordered him to be punished, and Laḥḥām fled Bukhārā. Balʿamī swiftly regretted having let him live, for he realized that he would make for Nīshāpūr, where he could continue his activities. Doubtless Balʿamī had learned his lesson from his dealings with Khwārazmī. Despite Abū ʿAlī's efforts to catch him, Laḥḥam escaped, but died shortly afterwards in Nīshāpūr.[98]

92 Khwārazmī, *Rasā'il Abī Bakr al-Khwārazmī*, N.al-Khāzin (ed.), Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāh, 1970, pp. 42–4, 117–20.

93 The details of Khwārazmī's relationship with Balʿamī are taken from Ṣidqī, *Dīwān al-Khwārazmī*, pp. 30–31, where the extant fragments may also be found.

94 Thaʿālibī, *Yatīmat al-Dahr fī Maḥāsin Ahl al-ʿAṣr*, M. Qamīḥa (ed.), Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1403.1983, IV, pp. 181–2.

95 Ibid, IV, p. 123.

96 Ibid, IV, p. 116.

97 Ibid, IV, p. 131.

98 Ibid, IV, pp. 131–2.

Bal'amī was not so unfortunate with all poets, and fragments of panegyric *qaṣīdas* survive by, among others, Abū Muḥammad al-Maṭrānī.[99] It is clear that Bal'amī was the major patron of Arabic poetry in this period. Tha'ālibī only cites one poem dedicated to Fā'iq, and one to Manṣūr b. Nūḥ, whereas Bal'amī is mentioned by six poets.[100] It is unclear to what extent Bal'amī patronized Persian poetry, for no early anthologies in Persian such as that of Tha'ālibī in Arabic have survived, and the extant Persian poetry is very fragmentary. It is highly unlikely that he did not have some interest in it, given both his own Persian work and that his father was a patron of Rūdakī. Several Persian poets mention a Bal'amī or the Bal'amīs, although they usually refer to Abū 'l-Faḍl rather than Abū 'Alī.[101] A couple of verses attributed to 'Bal'amī' survive but it is unclear whether they are by Abū 'Alī or his father.[102] Abū 'Alī is said to have died in Jumādā II February– March 363/974 by Gardīzī, but if we are to believe 'Utbī's account that he served as vizier for Nūḥ b. Manṣūr in 382/992, retiring the same year, his death must be placed between 382/992 and 387/997.[103]

Our picture of Abū 'Alī is thus one of a well-travelled, educated patron of literature. As for his political performance, his near-contemporaries, 'Utbī and Gardīzī, are in a better position to judge than ourselves, although admittedly 'Utbī's view may have been coloured by his own family's role in late Sāmānid politics. While they do have a distinctly low opinion of Abū 'Alī, he was serving at a time of great difficulties for the Sāmānid state. We lack sufficient information as to what extent he was responsible for such disastrous policies as the Sāmānid entanglement in Sīstān. However, the sources do indicate that he lacked his father's abilities, and the best that can be said is that he failed to avert political collapse.

## The literary culture of the Sāmānid *mashriq*

Bal'amī's interest in Arabic literature as well as Persian was typical of his times. Sāmānid Transoxiana was a multilingual society, the main languages current being Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Soghdian. Turkish had no literary status at this point, although it was probably widely spoken by both the Turks already settled in the region and the Turkish *ghilmān* that dominated the army. Soghdian was in severe decline, at least in urban areas, although Ibn Ḥawqal records hearing it spoken in Bukhārā.[104]

99 Ibid, IV, p. 133.
100 See ibid, IV, previous references and pp. 148, 181 and 335.
101 See *Tārīkhnāma*, I, *Pīshguftār*, pp. 36–8 for references.
102 These are reproduced in G.Lazard, *Les Premiers Poètes Persans (IXe–Xe siècles)*, Tehran-Paris: Institut franco-iranien, 1964, I, p. 135, II, p. 140.
103 Gardīzī, *Zayn al-Akhbār*, p. 163; 'Utbī/Manīnī, *Sharḥ al-Yamīnī*, I, p. 170; Dj. Khaleghi-Motlagh, 'Amīrak Bal'amī' in *EIr*, I, pp. 971–2.
104 Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-Arḍ*, J.Kramers (ed.), Leiden: Brill, 1929, II, p. 490.

Soghdian culture probably merged into Persian in Transoxiana, just as it did into Turkish in the Turkish-dominated east. Although the language may have survived until the seventh/thirteenth century, it played no cultural role of any importance.[105]

The predominant spoken language of Transoxiana was Persian. The prevalence of Persian in the region was intimately linked to its Islamization. The Arab settlers who had colonized Khurāsān had swiftly lost their language as a result of intermarriage with the indigenous population. When they moved eastwards, accompanied by the Khurāsānī converts, to conquer and settle Transoxiana, they took with them their new language, an early form of New Persian, lexically a mixture of Pahlavī and Arabic. The part played by the Arabs in the Persianization of Central Asia is recalled by the word Tājīk, derived from the Persian word for Arab, *tāzī*, a term synonymous with Muslim.[106]

Arabic and Persian were the principal written languages of Transoxiana. Like the *Tārīkhnāma*, numerous Persian texts of the period state that they were composed in Persian as Arabic was not widely understood.[107] Nonetheless, Arabic was frequently used, if only in limited circles. The Sāmānid court attracted poets from the Arab lands further to the west, and naturally these composed their works in Arabic. Plenty of native Transoxianans preferred Arabic too.[108] A philosopher like ʿĀmirī of Balkh, who will be discussed below, would inevitably write in Arabic. This was the language traditionally used for such subjects, and anyway there was no Persian vocabulary to express philosophical concepts adequately. Transoxianans also sometimes used Arabic for poetry and historical prose, even though others of their contemporaries preferred Persian for these genres. A number of poets were considered to be *dhū lisānayn* (‘possessed of two tongues’), writing in both Arabic and Persian—sometimes even in alternate lines in the same poem. A skilled littérateur like the famous Arabic author Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī could turn Persian verse into Arabic verse on the spot.[109] The audience for these bilingual games was probably restricted to the well-educated bureaucrats of the court who were at home in both languages—men like the various members of the Jayhānī, Balʿamī and ʿUtbī families. However, the widespread use of Arabic in epigraphy indicates that a much wider section of the population had at least some passive knowledge of the language.[110]

105 On the Soghdian language, see de la Vaissière, *Histoire*, pp. 327–331.

106 G.Lazard, ‘The rise of the New Persian language’ in *CHI* IV, p. 600.

107 L.Richter-Bernberg, ‘Linguistic Shuʿūbīya and early neo-Persian prose’, *JAOS* 94/i, 1974, pp. 56–7.

108 See R.N.Frye, ‘The development of Persian literature under the Sāmānids and Qarakhānids’ in *Yád-náme-ye Jan Rypka*, Prague: Academia, 1967, p. 70 on Transoxianan poets in Baghdad writing in Arabic.

109 E.G.Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, London: T.F.Unwin, 1902, I, pp. 463–4.

110 O. Pancaroğlu, ‘Serving wisdom: the contents of Samanid epigraphic pottery’ in R.Kessler et al., *Studies in Islamic and Later Indian Art from the Arthur M.Sackler Museum*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Art Museums, 2002, p. 66.

The everyday language of the court was probably Persian, just as it had been under the Ṭāhirids.[111] It is difficult to know exactly what to make of the statement in the Persian translation of the *Tafsīr* of Ṭabarī that Manṣūr b. Nūḥ ordered it to be translated 'because he found reading it difficult' in Arabic *(dushkhvār āmad bar vay khvāndan-i in kitāb va ʿibārat kardan-i an dar zabān-i tāzī),*[112] as it is immediately preceded by a preface entirely in Arabic which presumably the work's patron was intended to understand. The preface to the *Tārīkhnāma* also indicates that Manṣūr had read the work in Arabic before commissioning the Persian translation.[113] However, even if the Sāmānid amirs could understand Arabic, they may have been more at home in Persian, although only one, Manṣūr II b. Nūḥ (r. 387/997–389/999), composed anything in that language—a handful verses attributed to him survive.[114] The state bureaucracy seems to have used both Persian and Arabic, although the circumstances under which each language was used in unclear. In the early fourth/tenth century, documents addressed to a local audience that did not know Arabic may have been written in Persian, or at least read out in it, as Frye suggests,[115] while Arabic was maintained for diplomacy. Muqaddasī indicates that by the late fourth/tenth century Persian was the normal language of the bureaucracy as 'it is the language in which the letters of the ruler are written, and in which reports are submitted to him'.[116] Nonetheless, there was always some opposition to the use of Persian, as is demonstrated by the great resistance from the bureaucrats to the Ghaznavid vizier Isfarā'īnī's attempt to change the chancery language from Arabic to Persian.[117] It has been argued by Bulliet (on the basis of the somewhat tenuous evidence of the pottery remains of Nīshāpūr) that while the elite preferred Arabic and Islamic culture, Persian culture based on Iranian tradition appealed to the broader populace.[118] Our discussion of Sāmānid literature aims to assess to what extent this is true.

111 Bosworth, 'The Ṭāhirids and Persian culture', p. 105.

112 *Tarjuma-i Tafsīr-i Ṭabarī*, Ḥ. Yaghmā'ī (ed.), Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 2536, I, p. 5 (another version of the text has *ʿimārat kardan* for *ʿibārat kardan*).

113 *Tārīkhnāma,* I, p. 2.

114 Browne, *A Literary History of Persia,* I, pp. 468–9.

115 Frye, *Bukhara,* p. 51.

116 Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm,* p. 335. Translation from ibid, *The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions* (tr. B.Collins), Reading: Garnet, p. 273.

117 Richter-Bernburg, 'Linguistic Shuʿūbīya', pp. 57–8.

118 R.Bulliet, 'Pottery styles and social status in medieval Khurasan' in A.B.Knapp (ed.), *Archaeology, Annales, and Ethnohistory,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 80–82.

**The court and Sāmānid poetry**

Sāmānid poetry in Arabic and Persian only survives due to its inclusion in mediaeval literary anthologies or its citation in other works; no poet has left us an intact *dīwān*, at least that has been discovered so far. However, there is enough to give us an impression of its character. Although the court sponsored works in both Arabic and Persian, they are very different in character and are not at all, as Frye argued, 'one literature in two languages'.[119] Persian and Arabic poetry use the same metres (if not in the same way), and Persian poetry was technically heavily influenced by Arabic poetry. The differences between the two literatures are in content and audience.

The Arabic poetry of Transoxiana is preserved in the anthology by Thaʿālibī (d. 429/1038) known as the *Yatīmat al-Dahr*.[120] Much of it was written by immigrants to Transoxiana, and it concentrates on the genres of *madḥ* (praise) and *hijāʾ* (satire). There is little exceptional (either in literary quality or technique) about these works. Occasionally poets translated Persian proverbs or wrote on the Iranian New Year's festival, *Nawrūz*,[121] but otherwise the main local influence seems to be a deep dislike of Transoxiana and especially Bukhārā that permeates much of the Arabic poetry.[122] This was produced almost entirely by and for the Sāmānid bureaucrats, or aspirant bureaucrats: a number of the émigré poets had come to the Sāmānid court specifically hoping to be rewarded with a lucrative appointment, as did, for example, Abū Muḥammad al-Wāthiqī.[123] Likewise, many of the poets were already established in the bureaucracy. The father of Abū Aḥmad b. Abī Bakr al-Kātib had also been a *kātib* and then a vizier, and Abū Aḥmad saw himself as more deserving of the vizierate than Jayhānī or Balʿamī.[124]

Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Damghānī, another poet, himself served as vizier several times.

The most striking feature of the Arabic poetry in *Yatīma* is that virtually none of it is dedicated to members of the Sāmānid family. We have poems either lampooning or praising almost every Sāmānid vizier, among them Muṣʿabī, Jayhānī, Abū Jaʿfar ʿUtbī, Abū ʾl-Ḥasan ʿUtbī, Sulamī, Abū ʾl-Faḍl Balʿamī, Abū ʿAlī Balʿamī and Ibn ʿUzayr,[125] and a few addressed to other Sāmānid strongmen such as Bakr b. Mālik, Manṣūr b. Bāyqarā or the Muḥtājid Abū ʿAlī Ṣaghānī.[126] In contrast, in the approximately 150 pages in the

119 Frye, *Bukhara*, p. 60.
120 Thaʿālibī, *Yatīmat al-Dahr*, IV, pp. 67–222.
121 Ibid, IV, 134.
122 Ibid, IV, 80–81.
123 Ibid, IV, p. 220.
124 Ibid, IV, pp. 67–8.
125 Ibid, IV, pp. 86–7, 92, 96, 107, 116–124, 132, 143, 147, 155, 157, 159, 165, 176.

printed edition of the *Yatīma* devoted to the Arabic poetry of Transoxiana, only two fragments are dedicated to Sāmānid amirs: some extempore verses addressed to Naṣr II b. Aḥmad, and a fragment of a *qaṣīda* lamenting the death ʿAbd al-Malik and congratulating Manṣūr b. Nūḥ on his succession.[127] Indeed, some poets were actively hostile to the dynasty. Abū 'l-Ṭayyib al-Ṭāhirī, for instance, was a member of the Ṭāhirid family living in Bukhārā: 'He served the Sāmānids in public, but secretly he lampooned them, harbouring a deep hatred for them, hoping for an end to their rule and state because of their possession of his ancestors' lands.'[128] Wāthiqī, disappointed in his ambitions for an appointment, went over to the Qarakhānids and, according to Thaʿālibī, played an instrumental role in the destruction of the Sāmānid state.[129]

Panegyric and lampoon were also popular in Persian poetry, although epic and didactic poetry were also written from an early date. The first Persian poems (with the exception of a handful of even earlier fragments) were composed for the Ṣaffārids in the second half of the third/ninth century. However, the composition of poetry under the Sāmānids started not much later than this, and in contrast to the Arabic poetry, much of it was dedicated directly to the amirs. The first major Sāmānid poet was Shahīd of Balkh, who wrote a Persian *qaṣīda* for Naṣr I b. Aḥmad (250/864–279/892) of which only a couple of verses are extant.[130] Unfortunately, very little survives of the work of any early poet but Rūdakī (d. 329/940), but we also have tiny fragments of panegyrics to Naṣr II b. Aḥmad,[131] his successor Nūḥ,[132] ʿAbd al-Malik b. Nūḥ,[133] Manṣūr b. Nūḥ[134] and Nūḥ b. Manṣūr.[135]

Although some bureaucrats too showed an interest in Persian literature, few Persian poets were involved in the administration. Nonetheless, some fragments in Persian by the vizier Muṣʿabī have survived,[136] who was also the subject of a panegyric by Rūdakī.[137] Among Rūdakī's didactic works was a verse *Kalīla wa Dimna*, versified from a prose version that Naṣr had commissioned Balʿamī père to translate from the Arabic.[138] These poems would have been performed in the *majlis*, the palace soirée where poets would declaim before their patrons. A descriptions of a *majlis* is preserved in one of Rūdakī's few

126 Ibid, IV, pp. 86, 93, 145.
127 Ibid, IV, pp. 85, 147–8.
128 Ibid, IV, p. 79.
129 Ibid, IV, pp. 220–221.
130 Lazard, *Premiers Poètes*, I, p. 63, ll. 20–21.
131 Ibid, I, p. 85, II, p. 64, l. 1.
132 Ibid, I, p. 87, II, p. 67, ll. 18–21.
133 Ibid, I, p. 132, II, p. 136, ll. 33–4.
134 Ibid, I, p. 150, II, p. 159, ll. 157–9.
135 Ibid, I, p. 141, II, p. 148, ll. 51–2.
136 Ibid, I, pp. 74–5, II, pp. 48–9.
137 Nafīsī, *Muḥīṭ*, p. 501, ll. 258–262.
138 V.Minorsky, 'The older preface to the *Shāh-nāma*' in *Studi Orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi della Vida*, Rome: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1956, II, p. 168.

complete extant *qaṣīdas*, the famous *Mādar-i may*. In the presence of 'the king of kings of the world, the amir of Khurāsān', Naṣr b. Aḥmad, were seated his military commanders, Balʿamī, and *dihqāns*, while 'thousands of Turks' (the *ghilmān*) stood before him, as wine was poured by a beautiful noble Turkish youth.[139]

Sāmānid Persian poetry draws heavily on both Iranian and Islamic imagery. In the *Mādar-i may*, the Ṣaffārid ruler of Sīstān, Abū Jaʿfar Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, a Sāmānid vassal, is apostrophized in terms comparing him to the Iranian heroes of pre-Islamic times. He is 'made from the sun of the Sāsānian lineage' and, referring to one of the most famous of the legendary heroes, Rūdakī writes, 'Although the name of Rustam is very great, the name of Rustam-i Dāstān lives on in him.'[140] At the same time, Abū Jaʿfar is a praised in emphatically Muslim terms: 'If you are a *faqīh* and incline to the *sharīʿa*, behold in him Shāfiʿī, Abū Ḥanīfa and Sufyān [al-Thawrī]' …'there does not exist in the world his like as a Muslim and in nobility.'[141] Such Iranian allusions do not occur in the surviving Arabic poetry of the period. The contrast is illustrated by two fragments addressed to Manṣūr b. Nūḥ. While Daqīqī (d. c. 370/980), writing in Persian, addresses him as 'that king who recalls the House of Darius',[142] in the extant 15 lines of Ibn Huzaym's Arabic *qaṣīda* on Manṣūr's accession, there are no such Iranian references. Rather, it is Manṣūr's qualities as a protector of Islam that are emphasized.[143]

The use of these extravagant epithets comparing rulers to the Sāsānian kings or Iranian heroes does not mean that they were intended to be taken seriously as a political manifesto. Rather, they were just forms of poetic hyperbole more readily available to a poet writing in Persian than Arabic. Abū Jaʿfar is also compared to Solomon in the *Mādar-i may*, and the very fact that both the Sāmānid and Ṣaffārid rulers are said to be reminiscent of the Sāsānians suggests that this was just a stock epithet rather than a serious claim to be reviving the legacy of pre-Islamic Iran. Nonetheless, there does seem to have been a degree of interest in the Iranian past, although to what extent the court patronized it is unclear. A certain Masʿūdī of Marv is said to have written a *Shāhnāma* that seems to have dealt with the mythical Iranian kings Kayūmarth, Ṭahmūrath and Bahman, as well as the hero Rustam.[144] Too little remains to be sure of its contents, but it probably covered similar ground to Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*. Abū 'l-Muʾayyad of Balkh is also said to have composed a lost *Shāhnāma* about which almost nothing is known. More famous is Daqīqī's attempt at an epic, some of which was incorporated by Firdawsī into his *Shāhnāma*. Yet it does not seem that either Daqīqī or Firdawsī were working to a

139 Nafīsī, *Muḥīt*, p. 506, 11. 381–91. There are unfortunately some textual problems with the poem at this point, but the general meaning is clear enough.
140 Ibid, pp. 507, 508, 11. 398, 432.
141 Ibid, p. 507, 11. 403, 424.
142 Lazard, *Premiers Poètes*, I, p. 150; II, p. 159, 1. 159.
143 Thaʿālibī, *Yatīma*, IV, p. 148.
144 Lazard, *Premiers Poètes*, I, p. 22.

royal commission.[145] Indeed, Firdawsī indicates that he hoped for the Sāmānids' patronage after Daqīqī's death, but they were not in interested in his work: 'I set my face towards the throne of the king of the world…but there was no purchaser for my exertions.'[146] Only the patron of a prose *Shāhnāma* is known to us, Abū Manṣūr b. 'Abd al-Razzāq, the Sāmānid military commander of Khurāsān, who sought out old books from the *dihqāns* from which the *Shāhnāma* could be compiled. Even so, there is no suggestion that this lost prose *Shāhnāma* was commissioned for nationalistic reasons, but rather 'so that men of knowledge may look into it and find in it all about the wisdom of the kings, noblemen and sages, the royal arrangements, nature and behaviour, good institutions, justice and judicial norms…,'[147] In other words, it was compiled for the same ethical purposes as most historiography. Thus while there was an evident interest in tales of the Iranian past among some individuals, there is no evidence to suggest these were seen as serving any political or legitimatory purpose.[148]

## Sāmānid prose literature

Although Abū Manṣūr's *Shāhnāma* is lost, much more is preserved of Sāmānid prose literature than poetry, in both Arabic and Persian. Theology, history, geography and philosophy are the principal topics of the surviving works. Most of their authors were either bureaucrats or theologians. Writers started writing prose in Persian rather later than poetry—the earliest Sāmānid prose, the preface to Abū Manṣūr's *Shāhnāma*, is at least half a century later than the earliest poetry.[149] Prose literature in both Arabic and Persian

145 Despite the implication otherwise in articles such as Dj. Khaleghi-Motlagh, 'Daqīqī', *EIr*, VI, pp. 661–2, Firdawsī at no point says that Daqīqī was commissioned to write the *Shāhnāma* by Nūḥ b. Manṣūr. See Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, Dj. Khaleghī-Motlagh (ed.), New York: Mazda, 1987–, I, p. 13, 11. 128–132, V, p. 176, 11. 1066–9.

146 Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, I, pp. 13–14, 11. 135–9.

147 Minorsky, 'Older preface', p. 169.

148 Meisami (*Persian Historiography*, p. 44) argues that the commissioning of *Shāhnāmas* by Sāmānid princes 'were most likely intended to reinforce their claim to be authentic Persian rulers of the East, carrying on the traditions of Persian sovereignty, in order to attract the support of local princes and provincial governors who might have been attempted (sic) to transfer their allegiance to the Sāmānids' Būyid rivals.' However, there is no evidence of such a policy on the part of the Sāmānids, and if it had existed, it is strange that they should have rejected Firdawsī's offer of his *Shāhnāma*. Indeed, as Meisami points out (ibid, p. 41), Firdawsī's attitude toward the Sāmānids is distinctly ambivalent.

149 New Persian prose for practical purposes such as business letters was certainly written down long before this in some form, as examples of Judaeo-Persian from as early as the second/eighth century indicate. Here, however, however, we are concerned solely with the development of New Persian as a language of literature.

was dedicated to the Sāmānid amirs and their vassals and, unlike the poetry, there does not seem to be such a clear division between the tastes of the amirs and the bureaucracy or between the types of works written in each language. For instance, in the historical writing of the period, alongside the Persian *Tārīkhnāma* and Abū Manṣūr's *Shāhnāma*, the Arabic *Kitāb al-Bad' wa 'l-Ta'rīkh* survives and we know that Narshakhī's *History of Bukhārā*, extant only in a heavily revised Persian translation, was originally composed in Arabic for Nūḥ b. Naṣr.[150]

Theology is represented by the Arabic works of Māturīdī and his fellow theologians in Samarqand, produced without any state encouragement, although some elements of Māturīdī theology were adopted by the state. Their circulation was restricted to a limited number of highly educated scholars in the *mashriq*.[151] Much more significant for our purposes is the *al-Sawād al-A'ẓam*, a tract commissioned by the amir Ismā'īl b. Aḥmad to counter heresy in his domains, and subsequently translated into Persian, discussed below.

The Arabic literature of the bureaucrats is represented by three principal works, the *Mafātīḥ al-'Ulūm* of Khwārazmī, the *Jawāmi' al-'Ulūm* of Ibn Farīghūn and the *Kitāb al-Bad' wa-'l-Ta'rīkh* of Maqdīsī. Khwārazmī, writing around 387/977, was almost certainly employed in the Sāmānid bureaucracy. The *Mafātīḥ al-'Ulūm* was dedicated to the Sāmānid vizier Abū 'l-Ḥasan 'Utbī, and is addressed to the secretaries of the bureaucracy, being an encyclopaedia of technical terms they might need.[152] The *Jawāmi' al-'Ulūm* still awaits proper study, but seems to have been composed for the same purpose as Khwārazmī's work, although it was dedicated to a Sāmānid vassal, the Muḥtājid Abū 'Alī Ṣaghānī. Maqdisī's work, written in 355/966, has been the subject of a detailed study by Mahmoud Tahmi,[153] so only a few words need be said about it here. It is commonly described as a history, but although it does contain historical parts (covering history from creation to the 'Abbāsid period), it is also concerned with epistemology, theology and philosophy. Although it was long thought to have been dedicated to an unnamed Sāmānid vizier, Tahmi argues that in fact it was probably written for the Ṣaffārid Khalaf b. Aḥmad.[154] Maqdisī was interested in philosophy, being strongly influenced by Mu'tazilism, but he was firmly committed to

150 Narshakhi, *History*, p. 3.

151 See U.Rudolph, *Die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand*, Leiden: Brill, 1997, pp. 135–161 for Māturīdī's teachers and students and their works.

152 Bosworth, 'A pioneer Arabic encyclopedia of the sciences: al-Khwārazmī's Keys of the Sciences' *Isis* 44(1963), reprinted in ibid, *Medieval Arabic Culture and Administration*, London: Variorum, 1982, I, p. 100.

tradition, frequently citing *ḥadīth*. Maqdisī tells us he composed the work to correct 'those who have gone astray from the path', misled by those who deceive the weak, corrupt stupid people's beliefs, confuse intelligent people and so on. 'That is the worst of their plots for religion and the most coarse, due to their excellence in contradicting the monotheists (*al-muwaḥḥidūn*)… they are a blot on the ordinary people of the community (*'awwām al-umma*).'[155]

The growing hostility to philosophy as an alien, unislamic system of thought in the late fourth/tenth century *mashriq* probably explains why Maqdisī's work never gained any widespread popularity, and the author is unknown from any other source. 'Āmirī, a philosopher from Balkh active in the same period, certainly did not find the *mashriq* a sympathetic environment for his views. His best known work is *al-Amad 'alā 'l-Abad*, on the immortality of the soul, written in Bukhārā in 375/985. 'Āmirī's work was addressed to the pious public, *ḥadīth* scholars, jurists and *mutakallimūn* and aimed to persuade them that philosophy was not only an acceptable means of examining such problems, but could even support Islamic dogma.[156] Despite 'Āmirī's attempts to convince his sceptical audience by citing *ḥadīth*, his bitter complaints about the conservatism of the *mashriqī* populace indicate that he met with little success.

The Persian prose literature of the period was clearly intended to have a broader appeal than the somewhat rarified Arabic works. Only one entirely original Persian work survives, a geography entitled the *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam* composed c. 372/982–3 for Abu 'l-Ḥārith Muḥammad the Farghūnid, a vassal of the Sāmānids who ruled Jūzjān in the north of modern Afghanistan. It seems that the author of the *Jawāmi' al-'Ulūm* was also a member of this family. While the *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam* exhibits some interesting peculiarities of its own, it was solidly based on the works of earlier Arab geographers.

The other surviving Persian prose works are translations from the Arabic. Although a limited amount of Arabic poetry was translated under the Sāmānids—the poets Ibn al-Rūmī and Farazdaq—this does not seem to have had much influence.[157] In contrast, the translation of Arabic works into Persian became a vogue that continued throughout the mediaeval period, fundamentally influencing Persian literature. Some of the most popular

153 M.Tahmi, *L'Encydopédisme musulman a l'âge classique:* Le Livre de la création et de l'histoire *de Maqdisî*, Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1998.
154 Ibid, pp. 18–9.
155 Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-Bad' wa-'l-Ta'rīkh*, C.Huart (ed.), Paris: École des Langues Orientales Vivantes, 1899, I, p. 1.
156 Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, p. 3.
157 Frye, *Bukhara*, p. 62, and see J.Clinton, 'A sketch of translation and the formation of New Persian literature' in K.Eslami (ed.), *Iran and Iranian Studies: essays in honour of Iraj Afshar*, Princeton: Zagros, 1998, p. 294.

works in Persian prose, judging by the large numbers of manuscripts of them to survive, were actually translations from the Arabic; among historical works, for instance, Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī's Arabic *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* is attested by dozens of manuscripts in its Persian version,[158] and Jurbādhqānī's translation and adaptation of ʿUtbī's famous *al-Taʾrīkh al-Yamīnī* survives in at least 35.[159] Apart from Abū Manṣūr b. ʿAbd al-Razzāq's activities in seeking out books from the *dihqāns*, there seem to have been few translations made from Pahlavī into Persian. Even when Pahlavī works were translated, this does not necessarily seem to have been inspired by patriotic motives. For instance, the *Sindbādnāma*, of which a Persian translation was commissioned by Nūḥ b. Manṣūr in 339/950, is a mirror for princes set in India, so hardly a nationalist epic.[160]

Persian often seems to have been adopted for practical more than patriotic reasons. As the translators of the anti-heretical tract *al-Sawād al-Aʿẓam* put it, the book was translated 'so that that which the upper classes (*khāṣṣ*) had the ordinary people (*ʿāmm*) might have too and it might benefit them'.[161] The general ignorance of Arabic is reflected in a poem on medicine composed between 367/978 and 370/980 for the Sīmjūrid governor of Khurāsān. The author, Maysarī, remarks that he made the unusual choice of writing in Persian on this technical subject because 'our country is Iran, and the majority of its people know Persian'.[162] Even more radical than the choice of Persian for a technical subject was its use in religious works where previously Arabic had held sway. The three surviving Sāmānid prose translations are all of works of religious significance: Ṭabarī's famous *History*, his Qurʾānic commentary, and the anti-heretic tract *al-Sawād al-Aʿẓam*. I shall discuss the latter two here, reserving comment on Balʿamī's translation of the *History* for subsequent chapters.

### The *Tarjuma-i Tafsīr-i Ṭabarī*

A detailed study of the Persian translation of Ṭabarī's Qurʾānic commentary *(Tafsīr)* is beyond the scope of this work. However, the numerous similarities between the *Tafsīr* translation and the *Tārīkhnāma* render a brief examination of it obligatory. They were commissioned by the same patron, Manṣūr b. Nūḥ, and both treat their

158 Iu. Bregel', *Persidskaia Literatura: bio-bibliograficheskii obzor*, Moscow: Glavnaia Redaktsiia Vostochnoi Literatury, 1973, pp. 514–6, 1425.
159 Ibid, pp. 734, 1461. I deal with this topic more fully in my article 'The translation of historical works in the Islamic Middle Ages', in preparation.
160 Ẓahīrī Samarqandī, *Sindbādnāma*, M.Kamāl al-Dīnī (ed.), Tehran: Mīrāth-i Maktūb, 1381, p. 19.
161 Samarqandī, *Tarjuma-i al-Sawād al-Aʿẓam*, ʿA. Ḥabībī (ed.), Tehran: Initishārāt-i Bunyād-i Farhang-i Iran, 1348, p. 22.
162 Lazard, *Premiers Poetes*, II, p. 182, 1. 83.

Arabic originals in a similar way. The translators of both works were part of the Sāmānid state élite. While the *History* was put into Persian by the vizier Abū ʿAlī Balʿamī, the translation of the *Tafsīr* was authorized by leading religious scholars of Transoxiana, who selected the translators from among themselves.[163]

An explanation of the circumstances of the translation of the *Tafsīr* survives in its Persian preface:

> this work…was brought to the Amir Sayyid Muẓaffar Abū Ṣāliḥ Manṣūr b. Nūḥ… He found reading this book difficult and its expression in Arabic, so he desired it to be translated into Persian. Then he gathered the ulema of Transoxiana and got a *fatwā* from them as to whether it was permissible to translate it into Persian. They said it is permissible to read and write the *tafsīr* of the Qurʾān in Persian for someone who does not know Arabic, for as God Exalted has said, '*We have not sent a prophet but with the tongue of his people*'. Another [reason] is that people have known Persian of old, from the time of Adam to that of the Prophet Ismāʿīl, all the prophets and kings of the earth spoke Persian. The first to speak Arabic was the Prophet Ismāʿīl, and our Prophet came from the Arabs and the Qurʾān was sent to him in the Arabic language, but here in this region the language is Persian and its kings are Persian kings.[164]

It is instructive to compare this with the Arabic preface of the Persian *Tārīkhnāma*, which is probably the original one. Both works explain the translation in virtually identical terms: Manṣūr, after reading the Arabic *Taʾrīkh* and realizing it was useful, commanded it to be translated into Persian, so that everyone, both the authorities and the people, could profit from it. Even the same Qurʾānic verse is quoted to justify the translation. Indeed, Balʿamī specifically states that 'I compared it [the *History*] with the great *Tafsīr*.'[165]

The exact relationship between the texts of the Persian *Tafsīr* and the *Tārīkhnāma* is unclear due to the lack of early manuscripts of either work. Certainly, one would anticipate that Balʿamī and the *Tafsīr* translators, working on such similar, state-sponsored projects, would have been aware of each other's work, but although texts are often very similar they are rarely identical. For instance, the *Ḥadīth al-Ifk*, the false

163 *Tarjuma-i Tafsīr-i Ṭabarī*, I, p. 6.
164 Ibid, I, p. 5.
165 *Tārīkhnāma*, I, p. 2.
166 See *Tārīkhnāma*, III, p. 212 (and compare Cambridge University Library, MS Add 836 (discussed in Chapter 2), f. 107a) and *Tarjuma-i Tafsīr-i Ṭabarī*, p. 1124. The latter goes into more detail about the process by which lots were drawn to decide which of the Prophet's wives would accompany him on campaign and describes ʿĀʾisha's *hawdaj* (litter) in more detail than does Add 836.

accusation of adultery against Muhammad's wife ʿĀ'isha has the same structure and similar content in both Ṭabarī translations, but the *Tafsīr* goes into rather more detail.[166] Other passages where the *Tārīkhnāma* seems to refer to the *Tafsīr* may well be later interpolations.[167] Further research is needed to elucidate the relationship between the two works.

At any rate, it is clear that, like the *Tārīkhnāma*, the *Tafsīr* was not intended to be a literal translation of the Arabic original. Ṭabarī's original commentary was entitled *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āy al-Qurʾān* and is a huge work running to 30 printed volumes. The commentary on a single verse can run into tens of pages. Each verse is paraphrased, contrasting views about philological points are quoted and discussed, and traditions from the Prophet, his companions about its significance are cited. Ṭabarī usually concludes by stating his own views or by indicating which report he considers more trustworthy, and often polemicizes against views with which he disagrees. Ibn Nadīm, writing at the end of the fourth/tenth century, describes it as 'an unsurpassed work', but adds that an abridgement had already been made by his own time.[168]

Virtually all of the commentary, in particular the philological parts, is jettisoned in the Persian translation. The manuscripts consist of the Arabic text of the Qurʾān with an interlinear Persian translation. In some *sūras*, such as *al-Raʿd*, there is no commentary at all, just the translation. In others, the commentary does exist, but it functions in a very different way to that in the Arabic. After a number of verses, an anecdote or historical story, usually but not always obviously relevant to the preceding verses, is inserted, then the translation of verses continues.

The *Tafsīr* covers much the same topics as the *Tārīkhnāma*, with a similar interest in history or pseudo-history, although the latest historical event mentioned in the *Tafsīr* is the death of Ḥusayn, while the *Tārīkhnāma* probably continued at least up to the end of the Umayyad dynasty. The *Tafsīr* concentrates on the pre-Islamic prophets, the life of Muhammad and his campaigns, and the caliphate after his death. Thus most but not all of the accounts of pre-Islamic kings of Iran and Yemen found in the *Tārīkhnāma* are absent here, but other than that the contents of the works are different mainly in the way in which the subjects are arranged, order being dictated by chronology in the History and by the content of the Qurʾān in the *Tafsīr*.

It is not entirely surprising that the translators of the *Tafsīr* felt obliged to omit much of the philological discussion of the Arabic. Ṭabarī, after all, insisted on the necessity of knowing Arabic for studying the Qurʾān, a point which would have rather undermined the utility of the translation. The omission of *isnāds* may well be seen to be an attempt to popularize and abbreviate a work which was seen as overlong even in the fourth/tenth

167 See Chapter 2.

168 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, G.Flugel (ed.), Leipzig: F.C.W.Vogel, 1871, I, p. 235.

169 Samarqandī, *Tarjuma-i al-Sawād al-Aʿẓam*, pp. 18–19.

170 Ibid, p. 17.

century. However, the Persian *Tafsīr's* interest is in history rather than theology or exegesis proper. Although history was sometimes necessary to explain the Qur'ān, it would seem that the Persian *Tafsīr* was intended rather to promote a certain vision of the past, and that the use of a famous Qur'ānic commentary to do this was intended to support and legitimize this vision as being divinely ordained.

## The *Tarjuma-i al-Sawād al-Aʿẓam*

After the translations of the *Tafsīr* and the *History*, the next oldest work of New Persian prose is the *Tarjuma-i al-Sawād al-Aʿẓam*. The Arabic original was commissioned by the Sāmānid ruler Ismāʿīl b. Aḥmad, who, we are told

> ordered ʿAbdallāh b. Abī Jaʿfar and the other *faqīhs* to make clear correct belief and the path of *sunna* and *jamāʿa* which our fathers followed. Then the *imāms* and he said to Abū 'l-Qāsim Samarqandī, 'Make clear the correct way of *sunna* *jamāʿa* which the Prophet followed', and he ordered him to compose this book in Arabic. He brought it to the amīr of Khurāsān [Ismāʿīl] and everyone praised it, saying, 'This the correct path of *sunna* *jamāʿa*.'[169]

The work was needed 'because misguided people, innovators and heretics *(bīrāhān va mubtadiʿān va havādārān)* had become many in Samarqand, Bukhārā and Transoxiana'.[170] Seventy years later under Manṣūr b. Nūḥ's successor, it was anonymously translated into Persian 'because the amir of Khurāsān Nūḥ b. Manṣūr [366/976–387/997] desired it after he had gathered the ulema of all Transoxiana, that the correct path and the way of life of the Prophets, the Companions and the Rightly-guided Caliphs might become clear to them.'[171] The translation is reminiscent of the Persian *Tārīkhnāma* and *Tafsīr*. As in both of these works, the language used is extremely simple and unadorned, while all *isnāds* are omitted. The text of the Persian *al-Sawād al-Aʿẓam* also differs substantially from its Arabic original, which was probably intended largely as an anti-Karrāmī text.[172]

It has been argued that the work takes its name from the Māturīdī idea that Māturīdism represented the 'great mass' *(al-sawād al-aʿẓam)* of righteous believers.[173] The school of *kalām* of Māturīdī (d. c. 333/944), while virtually unknown west of Khurāsān, was the dominant school of Transoxiana. Māturīdī developed Ḥanafī teaching, attacking Muʿtazilism, the Karrāmiyya, Shīʿism and Ismāʿīlism.[174] According to Ḥajjī

171 Ibid, p. 22.
172 I am indebted to Luke Tread well for drawing my attention to this point.
173 W.Madelung, 'Māturīdiyya' in *EI2*, VI, p. 847.
174 Ibid, VI, p. 846.

Khalīfa, Abū 'l-Qāsim al- Samarqandī (d. 342/953–4) had been a colleague of Māturīdī himself.[175] Scholarly opinion is divided on the question of whether *al-Sawād al-A'ẓam* reflects traditional Ḥanafism or Māturīdī's development of it, and the most recent research argues that it is actually much closer to the former than the latter.[176] However, the tract was not written so much as with a view to disputing the niceties of *kalām* but as an easily comprehensible textbook for the Muslims of the *mashriq*.[177]

The Persian *al-Sawād al-A'ẓam* is characterized by the defence of orthodoxy, as seen from a Ḥanafī point of view: 61 theological questions (*mas'ala*) are addressed.[178] Each *mas'ala* starts with a brief statement of the orthodox position which is usually supported by the citation of *ḥadīths*. Those who dissent from this position are condemned. Topics covered range from those with which most Muslims would not disagree, such as the necessity of prayer,[179] to more controversial ones such as the uncreated nature of the Qur'ān.[180] The targets are generally the groups outlined above, and *al-Sawād al-A'ẓam* takes a fairly hard-line stance, condemning, for example, the Mu'tazilī belief in the createdness of the Qur'ān as unbelief.[181] Indeed, 'Mu'tazilī' is occasionally used as a synonym for heretic.[182] Only occasionally is the work overtly political, as when disobedience to the ruler is condemned, but this was a commonplace amongst mediaeval Sunnī thinkers.[183]

Yet it is difficult to use *al-Sawād al-A'ẓam* to support the contention that Ismā'īlism was a pressing threat to the state and the orthodox; rather, it demonstrates the opposite. For sure, 'Bāṭinīs' do get a few mentions, but they are only one of Samarqandī's many targets. Far more attention is given to other groups such as the Mu'tazila, the Rāfiḍites and the Karrāmiyya. This confirms the evidence cited above that Ismā'īlism was not a major concern for the Sāmānid state in the second half of the fourth/tenth century. Rather, *al-Sawād al-A'ẓam* illustrates the conservative, piety-minded mentality of fourth/tenth century Transoxiana, with its emphasis on the path of Sunnī traditionalism.

175 Mustafa ben Abdallah Katib Jelebi, *Lexicon Bibliographicum et Encyclopaedium (Kashf al-Ẓunūn 'an Asāmī al-Kutub wa-'l-Funūn)*, G.Flugel (ed.), Leipzig: Oriental Translation Fund, 1845, IV, p. 242. (Henceforth, Ḥajjī Khalīfa, *Lexicon*.)

176 For a discussion of *al-Sawād al-A'ẓam* in general see Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*, pp. 106–131, and on these debates in particular, pp. 111–113.

177 Ibid, p. 118.

178 Ḥajjī Khalīfa says it was 62 questions (*Lexicon*, III, p. 629), which presumably refers to the Arabic original, which I have been unable to examine.

179 Samarqandī, *Tarjuma-i al-Sawād al-A'ẓam*, p. 33.

180 Ibid, p. 36.

181 Ibid, loc cit.

182 E.g. ibid, pp. 73–4 on the necessity of reading the Qur'ān: *har kih munkir shavad, havādār va mu'tazilī bāshad*.

183 Ibid, p. 40.

Persian prose seems to have emerged from the state's desire to propagate conservative Islamic values amongst the pious Transoxianan public. It is very different from Sāmānid Persian poetry that drew freely on pre-Islamic, Iranian imagery and was written by and for the court. Bulliet's hypothesis of Iranian traditions appealing mainly to the\social orders is thus untenable. The coexistence of these contrasting cultural orientations is illustrated by a medallion that Manṣūr b. Nūḥ had struck in 358/968–9 to underline his own claims to kingship in the face of his Būyid rival's assumption of the ancient Iranian title *shāhānshāh*. The Sāmānid medallion is inscribed in Pahlavī as well as Arabic, and the title *shāhanshāh* is used.[184] To an extent, therefore, the Sāmānids were prepared to use the Iranian past as a legitimizing device, although it is intriguing to note that the royal bust is derived from an eastern Iranian, but not Sāsānian, source. As Luke Treadwell has noted, this donative medallion was intended solely for a court audience, probably for distribution at Nawrūz. Such images are never found on the Sāmānids' coinage destined for general distribution, which always refer to the amirs in traditional Islamic terms. The Sāmānids' Iranian connections were stressed only in the limited context of the court. For the purposes of the outside world, the Sāmānids were first and foremost Islamic, not Iranian, rulers. The religious, piety-minded emphasis of state-sponsored early Persian prose literature is symptomatic of the thoroughly Islamic character of the Sāmānid state.

184 Treadwell, '*Shāhānshāh and al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad*', p. 329.

# 2
# The transmission of the *Tārīkhnāma's* text

Pre-modern Muslims thought about books and texts very differently from the way we do today. One of the most distinctive characteristics of Islamic civilization is the importance given to orality, which was considered a more reliable and desirable method of transmitting texts than writing, although both existed side by side. Even after paper became widely available in the third/ninth century, allowing the cheaper copying of books, oral transmission retained its prestige and it was never entirely abandoned.[1] For instance, the historian Miskawayh (d. 421/1030) tells us that Ṭabarī's *History* had been transmitted to him both orally and in writing.[2] Oral transmission was so esteemed that authors would sometimes indicate that a work had been transmitted to them orally whereas in reality they had been working from a manuscript.[3] The primacy of orality in transmitting texts had varying results in different literary fields. In *ḥadīth*, where precision was important, and a reputable scholar would not wish to alter deliberately what had been transmitted to him, there was a strong emphasis on memorization, and subsequently, when manuscript editions became widespread (if always regarded with suspicion), on collating the text of various manuscripts.

In the transmission of other forms of literature the exact reproduction of the original text was not valued so highly. Rather, what was important was to preserve the artistic quality of the work, if necessary by altering and improving it.[4] This 'free transmission' of texts was considered both normal and desirable.[5] Above all, texts were meant to provide their readers with benefits.[6]

1 G.Schoeler, *Écrire et transmettre dans les débuts de l'islam*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002, p. 120. See also C.F.Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 176–7.

2 Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-Umam wa-Ta'āqib al-Himam*, S. Ḥasan (ed.), Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1424/2003, V, p. 329.

3 W. al-Qāḍī, 'Kitāb Ṣiwān al-Ḥikma: structure, composition, authorship and sources', *Der Islam* 58/i, 1981, p. 113.

4 Schoeler, *Écrire et transmettre*, pp. 20–21. See also M.Smurzyński, 'The anthropological aspect of manuscripts' multiplicity in Persian' in M.Szuppe (ed.), *Iran: Questions et Connaissances*, II: *Périodes médiévale et moderne*, Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, 2002 (*Cahiers de Studia Iranica* 26), pp. 203–211.

5 Schoeler, *Écrire et transmettre*, p. 36.

6 M.Chamberlain, *Knowledge and social practice in medieval Damascus, 1190–1350*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 112.

Bal'amī notes in his introduction to the *Tārīkhnāma* that Manṣūr b. Nūḥ studied Ṭabarī's work 'until he had acquired the paradigms [of behaviour] *(manāhij)* gathered in it'.[7] As Michael Chamberlain writes of mediaeval Damascus, 'authors of books, copyists, booksellers, owners, and readers experienced their ties to one another in part as altruistic bonds'.[8] The entire concept of authorship was perceived rather differently from today: '[t]he idea that books are singular products of individual wills, belonging to their authors as unmistakably as their personalities, is a modern one that would not have been understood in Damascus.'[9] As a result, mediaeval readers, writers and copyists had little compunction about altering the contents of books to make them more 'beneficial' for readers.[10]

This did not apply equally to all texts. Canonical *ḥadīth* collections were more or less exempted from such alterations, and there was also a luxury market in literary classics which, up to a point, may have been less susceptible to amendment on such a large scale.[11] Nonetheless, as Grégoire Schoeler argues, the Islamic concept of free textual transmission is incompatible with the idea of the existence of a definitive recension of individual texts.[12] Yet traditional Western textual criticism, originally developed for editing Classical texts, is based on the principle that, by using a stemmatic approach, the archetype of the original text can be reconstructed. The application of such a theory to processes of textual transmission lacking such fixed archetypes is clearly flawed.

It might be imagined that the textual critic is on relatively safe ground when dealing with texts of which the author's autograph copy, or copies directly descended from it, exist. However, authors frequently revised their texts radically. Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1232) may have spent up to ten years revising his monumental universal chronicle, *al-Kāmil fī 'l-Ta'rīkh*, and the extant first draft of the historian Maqrīzī's (d. 845/1442) *Khiṭaṭ* differs substantially from the final product.[13] On occasion, more than one recension of the same work by the author's own hand came into circulation. Such seems to have been the case with the *Saljūqnāma* of Nīshapūrī, a late sixth/twelfth century Persian history, although the difference between the two recensions does not seem to have been very extensive in this instance.[14] Very rarely, several autograph manuscripts are extant, as is the case with Ibn al-'Arabī's *al-Tanazzulāt*

7 *Tārīkhnāma-i Ṭabarī gardānīda-i mansūb bi-Bal'amī*, M.Rawshan (ed.), Tehran: Soroush, 1378/1999, I, p. 2.
8 Chamberlain, *Knowledge and social practice*, p. 142.
9 Ibid, p. 141.
10 Ibid, pp. 143–4.
11 Ibid, p. 143.
12 Schoeler, *Écrire et transmettre*, p. 21.
13 Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, p. 184.
14 Ẓahīr al-Dīn Nīshāpūrī, *The* Saljūqnāma: *a critical text making use of the unique manuscript in the Library of the Royal Asiatic Society*, A.H.Morton (ed.), np: Gibb Memorial Series, 2004, introduction, p. 39.

*al-Mawṣiliyya*. In this text, even manuscripts *in the author's own hand* contain nonsensical readings.[15]

The problems besetting the study of Islamic texts are illustrated exceptionally clearly by the case of the *Tārīkhnāma*. As Elton Daniel has noted, 'Even when the manuscripts of Bal'amī's history are reduced to the dozen or so earliest examples (dating to 850/1446 or before), the variant readings found in them far exceed in quantity and nature those that one would expect to find as the result of simple scribal errors, missing folios, and the like.'[16] Furthermore, not a single manuscript has survived from the Sāmānid era, with the earliest dating from several generations after Bal'amī's death. The state of the Persian manuscripts veils from us Bal'amī's original text and intentions. It is likely that they do in places retain Bal'amī's words in some form or other, but it is rarely possible to identify such passages with certainty. Nor does the edition of Muḥammad Rawshan offer a secure foundation for studying Bal'amī, for it merely reproduces the faults of the manuscripts.

Any study of the *Tārīkhnāma* must therefore focus on its highly complex textual tradition, as one cannot discuss Bal'amī's work without considering the extent to which the manuscripts represent the text he wrote as opposed to the interpolations and adaptations of later copyists. In this chapter we will examine previous scholars' investigations of the manuscripts, which have usually attempted to categorize manuscripts of the *Tārīkhnāma* according to 'redaction'. I will suggest that in the case of the *Tārīkhnāma* the concept of redaction is not especially useful for understanding the genesis of the text. I will argue that in fact the *Tārīkhnāma* presents a case of 'horizontal transmission' where the text has been contaminated by readings from several different sources, including Ṭabarī's Arabic original. In fact, an early Arabic translation of Bal'amī appears to present a more conservative text than the existing Persian manuscripts do.[17] The discovery of this Arabic translation offers a better basis on which study Bal'amī than has been available hitherto. Obviously, it is still an imperfect tool: not only is the work a translation, and thus cannot preserve Bal'amī's exact words, but it is also a copy at several removes from the lost original. However, by using it in

15 K.Lahham, 'Ibn al-'Arabī's *al-Tanazzulât al-Mawṣiliyya*: a textual study and critical edition', unpublished PhD thesis, Cambridge University 1996, p. 61.

16 E.Daniel, 'Manuscripts and editions of Bal'amī's *Tarjamah-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*', *JRAS* 3rd series, 2(1990), pp. 288–9. This important article outlines in more detail than space here allows the problems of the manuscript tradition and of the various published editions. This chapter will therefore concentrate on points not discussed by Daniel. Appendix III presents amendments to the 'Annotated Inventory of Bal'amī Manuscripts' appended to his article. I have also discussed the *Tārīkhnāma's* text more briefly in 'The medieval manuscript tradition of Bal'amī's version of al-Ṭabarī's *History*' in J.Pfeiffer and M.Kropp (eds), *Theoretical Approaches to the Edition and Transmission of Oriental Manuscripts*, Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag, forthcoming.

17 Given the vast number of surviving manuscripts, it has not been possible to examine them all. This discussion is thus illustrated mainly by examples drawn from the early phase of the manuscript tradition, that is, down to the ninth/fifteenth century. Every effort has been made to survey the most important early manuscripts, but some have been omitted as they were inaccessible.

conjunction with the older Persian manuscripts, one can start to make credible hypotheses as to the contents of the fourth/tenth century text of the *Tārīkhnāma*.[18]

## The manuscript problem of the *Tārīkhnāma:* an outline

The exact number of extant manuscripts of the *Tārīkhnāma* is unknown. One hundred and sixty are listed by Daniel in his inventory of manuscripts,[19] so the total number is doubtless somewhat greater, if impossible to estimate. Many library collections, especially, although by no means exclusively, in the Middle East, are uncatalogued or inadequately catalogued and there are also many inaccessible private collections. The manuscript tradition of the *Tārīkhnāma* is reminiscent of that of another early Persian work, Firdawsī's celebrated *Shāhnāma*. In neither case, despite the great number of extant manuscripts, do we have any copies made fewer than 200 years after the works' composition.[20]

A handful of *Tārīkhnāma* manuscripts survive from the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries, mainly in very fragmentary form.[21] At least 11 manuscripts dating to the eighth/fourteenth century have survived more or less intact,[22] probably as a consequence of interest in the work in the Īlkhānate for political reasons (see Chapter 5). The standard published edition by Muhammad Rawshan is based on a manuscript of the early eighth/fourteenth century, RAS, Persian 22, in some ways an unfortunate choice

18 For reasons of space, I do not examine here or in Chapter 5 the process in which some copyists would update the vocabulary of the *Tārīkhnāma* by substituting Arabic words for the more archaic Persian ones, as (perhaps surprisingly) there does not appear to be a correlation between this and more large-scale alterations to the text. For an example of this updating see A.J.Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1958, pp. 39–40, and on the *Tārīkhnāma's* language, G.Lazard, *La langue des plus anciens monuments de la prose persane*, Paris: C.Klinksieck, 1963, pp. 38–41 and A.Azarnouche, 'La formation du persan sous l'influence de la langue arabe au iv$^{e}$/x$^{e}$ siècle' in M.Szuppe (ed.), *Iran: Questions et Connaissances*, II, pp. 11–19.
19 Daniel, 'Manuscripts and editions', pp. 309–321.
20 The *Shāhnāma* was completed around the beginning of the fifth/eleventh century, and the earliest surviving manuscript is the Florence manuscript dating to 614/1217.
21 The oldest dated manuscript is the Mashhad manuscript of 586/1190, although British Library, Or 7324 is probably of a similar date or possibly slightly older. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ancien fonds persan 63 and Edirne, İl Halk Kütüphanesi, Selimiye 1036 are probably seventh/thirteenth century; Bodleian, Laud Or 323 is an important manuscript of either the seventh/thirteenth or eighth/fourteenth century. Daniel's reference to 'Bursa, Genel Kütüphane 1612 (F)' as an early Bal'amī manuscript is erroneous; he also lists two more seventh/thirteenth century manuscripts I have been unable to examine, in Dushanbe and Tehran (Bahār 186). An examination of both of these would be worthwhile, but is unlikely to give us great new insights into the *Tārīkhnāma*. See Appendix III for further details on the manuscripts.
22 Daniel ('Manuscripts and editions', p. 288) lists ten manuscripts dating to the eighth/fourteenth century, to which should be added MS Or 171 in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana (Venice). A fragment of two folios from an Īlkhānid *Tārīkhnāma* also survives in the Library of Congress.

due to the obvious Shīʿite interpolations it contains.[23] Interestingly, one of only three known illustrated Balʿamī manuscripts comes from this period.[24]
As the earliest extant manuscripts were copied at least 200 years after the *Tārīkhnāma,* it is hardly surprising that they appear to be extremely corrupt. Variations of vocabulary and grammar abound, but more seriously, the contents of the text differ substantially from one manuscript to another. For example, RAS, Persian 22 has a very long account of Gayūmarth, the first Persian king,[25] which does not appear in manuscripts of a similar date such as Süleymaniye, Fatih 4285 or Oxford, Bodleian, Laud Or 323. Even the introduction to the *Tārīkhnāma* survives in two versions, one Arabic, the other Persian, with rather different contents. Although Balʿamī was instructed 'to excise whatever repetitions there are in the [Arabic] book',[26] manuscripts from time to time do repeat narratives. Perplexingly, we frequently find comments in the manuscripts stating that a given passage was not to be found in Ṭabarī's version, so the copyist had taken it from another source for completeness; yet the very same passage may often be found in published editions of Ṭabarī. Furthermore, all manuscripts of the *Tārīkhnāma* contain numerous quotations in Arabic, not just from the Qurʾān but also from poets. These are by no means always accompanied by a Persian translation, even though Balʿamī indicates in his preface that the *Tārīkhnāma* was composed for the benefit of those who did not know Arabic.

The state of the manuscript tradition means it is often impossible to ascertain the relationship between manuscripts, as will be discussed in detail below. In some cases manuscripts do have an easily recognizable relationship to one another. For example, the contents of Süleymaniye, Aya Sofya 3050 and Aya Sofya 3051, both early eighth/fourteenth century, appear to be virtually identical as their copyists were brothers

23 Rawshan's edition is essentially a printed version of RAS, Persian 22, with the addition of a few missing passages from other manuscripts. Fortunately, these additions are marked. For ease of reference, I shall therefore cite RAS, Persian 22 by the page numbering in Rawshan rather than by folio number. The interpolations will be discussed further below.
24 This is the Freer manuscript, probably written for a Christian governor of Mosul, which has been extensively investigated from an art historical perspective by Teresa Fitzherbert. See T.Fitzherbert, '"Balʿamī's Ṭabarī": an illustrated manuscript of Balʿamī's *Tarjama-yi Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī* in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington (F59.16, 47.19, 30.21)', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh 2001 (publication forthcoming as *Prophets, Kings and Caliphs: an Ilkhanid illustrated copy of Balʿamī's* History *in the Freer Gallery of Art,* Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art Occasional Papers, New Series, Smithsonian Institution). The other known illustrated manuscripts are the Chester Beatty manuscript (Persian 144) in Dublin, dating to the ninth/fifteenth century, and containing considerably fewer illustrations, and an undated, late Tīmūrid manuscript. The latter is currently held in a private collection and is said to be inaccessible to scholars at the moment. Drouot Richlieu, *Art Ottoman provenant des Collections de SAI Ottomane le Prince X: petit fils du Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876–1909); Art d'Orient vente aux encherches publiques, Lundi-Mardi 6–7 Avril 1998, Lot 306,* Paris 1998, pp. 73–9, cited in Fitzherbert, '"Balʿamī's Ṭabarī"', I, p. 2, n. 6.
25 *Tārīkhnāma,* I, pp. 77–87.
26 *Tārīkhnāma,* I, p. 2.

and worked from the same original manuscript. Yet the relationship between these manuscripts does not allow one to trace the history of the text any further back than the original current in the eighth/fourteenth century from which they are descended. Conventional wisdom states that earlier rather than later manuscripts should be used to establish the text, yet in the case of the *Tārīkhnāma* even the earliest manuscripts contain major interpolations. Indeed, early manuscripts such as the Mashhad manuscript or Bodleian, Laud Or 323 tend to present eclectic texts which are especially difficult to relate to other manuscripts.

## Previous scholarship on the text of the *Tārīkhnāma*

The earliest attempt to analyse and resolve the *Tārīkhnāma's* textual problems was by Hermann Zotenberg, the French translator of Balʿamī who completed Dubeux's unfinished work. Zotenberg based his translation on ten manuscripts which he considered to form two basic groups. These he described as 'la rédaction primitive' and 'la nouvelle rédaction corrigée'. Zotenberg described the 'new corrected' redaction as being more 'developed' than the 'primitive' one, by which he presumably meant longer or more detailed. Zotenberg's analysis was rather simplistic, and he admitted that even of the ten manucripts he was using some did not conform to his theory.[27] He based his translation on Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France (henceforth, BNF), MS ancien fonds persans 63 ('A' in his terminology). Other manuscripts were used to supplement and correct it, for he described A as 'très-incorrect' with numerous minor lacunae, and a representative of the 'primitive' redaction. It is a somewhat eclectic manuscript, for it lacks both beginning and end, and some chapters are out of place. It was presumably its antiquity—Blochet dates it to the early seventh/thirteenth century [28]—which persuaded Zotenberg to rely on it so extensively. Its text is indeed sometimes less extensive than that found in other manuscripts: only five lines are devoted to the reign of Gayūmarth, as opposed to three folios in Zotenberg's E, a representative of his 'new corrected redaction' (RAS, Persian 22). However, the evidence of some manuscripts suggests that the 'primitive' redaction is not always characterized by a more concise text than the 'new corrected' redaction. Appendix I (A) presents a comparison of a passage in the two different redactions: in this instance, the text of the 'primitive' redaction is actually considerably more extensive than that of his 'new corrected' redaction, indicating that Zotenberg's classification of the manuscripts is unreliable.

The publication of de Goeje's edition of the Arabic *History*, completed in 1901, lessened the interest in Balʿamī which had mainly been prompted by a desire to reconstruct the contents of Ṭabarī's work, long believed lost in its entirety. However, in

27 [Balʿamī], *Chronique de Abou-Djafar-Mohammed-ben Djarir-ben-Yezid Tabari, traduite sur la version per sane d'Abou ʿAli Mohammed ben Beʿami* (tr. H.Zotenberg), Paris: Oriental Translation Fund, 1867, I, pp. vi–vii.

28 E.Blochet, *Catalogue des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, Paris: Imprimèrie nationale, 1905, p. 192.

1958 two Soviet scholars, Griaznevich and Boldyrev, produced a study of the *Tārīkhnāma's* prefaces, arguing that manuscripts could be classified into redactions according to whether they had an Arabic or Persian preface.[29] They argued, probably correctly, that the Arabic preface is older,[30] although there is no evidence that the contents of the manuscripts in which it occurs are more reliable or authentic. In fact the evidence does not support Griaznevich and Boldyrev's hypothesis, for there is no consistent correlation between the contents of manuscripts and the language of the preface. For example, both Oxford, Bodleian, Laud Or 323 and RAS, Persian 22 have an Arabic preface but the former manuscript contains rather more detailed accounts for much of the Islamic section. In fact, RAS, Persian 22 is seems to be closer to some manuscripts with Persian prefaces. For instance, both RAS Persian 22 and Süleymaniye, Fatih 4281, which has a Persian preface, have detailed accounts of Gayūmarth and Bahrām Chūbīn. Yet it is also clear that none of these manuscripts is directly related.

The research of Elton Daniel significantly modified Griaznevich and Boldyrev's conclusions, and has done much to advance our understanding of the *Tārīkhnāma's* text. Daniel groups the manuscripts into three different redactions: a late redaction, a full redaction, and an abbreviated redaction.[31] The 'late redaction' is said to be distinguished by having a Persian doxology and preface, an overall abbreviation of the text, an omission of Arabic poetry found elsewhere, and the replacement of Arabic vocabulary with Persian equivalents.[32] The 'full redaction' supposedly has more detailed accounts of Islamic, especially ʿAbbāsid history. The 'abbreviated redaction' resembles the late redaction in its abridgement of the text, although its accounts, particularly of later ʿAbbāsid history, are rather more detailed than those in the latter version.

However, if different criteria are used to classify the texts, they do not necessarily support Daniel's theory. The contents of manuscripts from different redactions may not diverge as much as one would assume, while any two manuscripts from a given redaction may vary more from each other than from ones supposedly belonging to the other redactions. Appendix I (B) presents a comparison of a passage on the ancestry of the Prophet from two different manuscripts, British Library, IO Isl 2669 and British Library, IO Isl 1983, both identified by Daniel as being representatives of the late redaction. The second of these extracts covers the same events as the first three lines of the first one, and devotes several more folios to events described by IO Isl 2669 in a few lines. Equally, manuscripts of the abbreviated redaction may be more detailed than the full redaction, while the late redaction frequently offers the most abbreviated accounts. An example of

29 P.A.Griaznevich and A.N.Boldyrev, 'O dvukh redaktsiiakh "Ta'rikh-i Ṭabarī" Bal'amī' *Sovetskoe Vostokovedenie* 3, 1957, esp. pp. 48–53.

30 The Soviets' argument is based on the fact that the titulature used in the Arabic preface to refer to the amir Manṣūr b. Nūh is not that which it would have been customary to use posthumously, but rather is that found on contemporary coins, and therefore the Arabic preface probably dates to Bal'amī's own time. See ibid, pp. 54–5.s

s Daniel, 'Manuscripts and editions', pp. 299–301.

32 Daniel, ibid, p. 299, also suggests that the presence of the *Akhbār Muqanna'* and the terminus with Mustaẓhir are the 'absolute hallmarks' of this redaction. However, as will be demonstrated below, if we examine the manuscripts using different criteria, it becomes impossible to consider many of them to be related.

this is the account of the career of Bahrām Chūbīn: in RAS, Persian 22 (abbreviated redaction) and Bodleian, Ouseley 359 (full redaction) the account is the same, fairly extensive and detailed, but in Bodleian, Elliot 377 (late redaction), the episode is greatly shortened.[33] The account of the caliphate and murder of ʿUthmān, on the other hand, is fairly similar in all of these.[34]

In some unpublished research, Daniel has drawn up a table comparing the section headings of fifteen early manuscripts,[35] which illustrates that later manuscripts do tend to have more extensive texts than earlier ones—or at least more additional chapters. However, section headings are by no means a completely reliable method of classifying the text. A manuscript may have a section heading identical to that found in other manuscripts, yet

33 The principal difference between Bodleian, Elliot 377 and the other manuscripts mentioned here is that the former text gives the bare details of Bahrām Chūbīn's career and regency, omitting, for example, the account of his encounter with a fairy and some of the prophecies of his future greatness which precede the account of his rise to power elsewhere. This it shares with Süleymaniye, Fatih 4285, supposedly a representative of the abbreviated redaction according to Daniel's database discussed below. (See Fitzherbert, '"Balʿamī's Ṭabarī"', I, p. 251.) However, like Ṭabarī but unlike the other manuscripts it makes Hurmuz the king's son Parvīz complicit in his murder (Elliot 377, f. 139b, and Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-Rusul wa-ʾl-Mulūk*, M.de Goeje (ed.), Leiden: Brill, 1879, I, p. 998). Elliot 377 (f. 140b) also states that an angel rescued Parvīz from Bahrām Chūbīn, something specifically denied by RAS, Persian 22 (*Tārīkhnāma*, II, pp. 797–8). In general, however, there are few direct factual contradictions between the manuscripts. Interestingly, the account of Bahrām Chūbīn's career is omitted entirely from Bodleian, Laud Or 323 and Tashkent, Beruniy, 2816, a much later manuscript.

34 The most substantial difference is that RAS, Persian 22 is clearly more hostile to ʿUthmān than the other manuscripts. For example, most other manuscripts include, after the account of his murder, a chapter on the lineage, wives, and number of children of the caliph. (These are also omitted in Tehran, Kitābkhāna-i Majlis, 5575.) Yet while this may appear to indicate that RAS, Persian 22 is indeed the abbreviated redaction, the manuscript also contains details not usually to be found elsewhere, such as the story that the father of Walīd b. ʿUqba, ʿUthmān's governor in Kūfa, had spat in the face of the Prophet, who had ordered him to be killed on the day of Badr. (*Tārīkhnāma*, III, p. 576; this is omitted in Kitābkhāna-i Majlis, 5575.) Furthermore, like Kitābkhāna-i Majlis, 5575, a manuscript to which it is probably related, it includes considerably longer and more detailed accounts of Gayūmarth and Bahrām Chūbīn than those which may be found elsewhere, as for example in Süleymaniye, Fatih 4285 and BNF, anciens fonds persans 63. It scarcely need be stressed how damaging to ʿUthmān are the allegations about his governor's ancestry. Given that all the other manuscripts I have examined are considerably less obviously hostile to ʿUthmān than this, the aforementioned omissions in RAS, Persian 22 may be attributed to sectarian hostility on the copyist's part rather than to a difference in the manuscript tradition. Interestingly, Bodleian, Laud Or 323, which, if Boldyrev and Griaznevich's theory was correct in dividing manuscripts into redactions based on whether the preface was in Arabic or Persian, should be considered related to RAS, Persian 22, has much more detail in this section of the text than any of the manuscripts under discussion in this instance. It gives extremely detailed accounts of Walīd b. ʿUqba's governorship and how he was dismissed after being caught drinking, and of the death of the last Sāsānian Emperor, Yazdagird b. Shahriyār. In this it resembles Tashkent, Beruniy 2073, another eighth/fourteenth century manuscript (although one which lacks both the beginning and end, rendering it impossible to classify according to preface).

35 See Fitzherbert, '"Balʿamī's Ṭabarī"', I, pp. 251–2.

the actual text may be very different indeed.[36] Conversely, a manuscript may omit section headings yet the text may well be similar to or the same as that found in a manuscript where the section heading is present.[37]

Muḥammad Rawshan, the most recent editor of the *Tārīkhnāma,* supported Griaznevich and Boldyrev's theory of two redactions.[38] To explain the sixth/twelfth century Mashhad manuscript, which differs considerably from most other early manuscripts, Rawshan suggested it was the sole extant example of an otherwise lost third redaction.[39] He also offered a new thesis as to why there were so many differences between the manuscripts. He suggested that Bal'amī was not the author of the *Tārīkhnāma,* but rather had employed scribes to write the work for which he subsequently took the credit.[40] Rawshan compared this to the case of the Īlkhānid *Jāmi' al-Tawārikh,* which the historian Qāshānī claimed was largely his work rather than Rashīd al-Dīn's—a claim that most scholars dismiss, although it is probably true that Rashīd al-Dīn did employ a team of scribes to assist him.[41] The composition of the *Tārīkhnāma* by a group of scribes rather than a single author led to the presence of so many variants.

However, there are serious objections to Rawshan's theory. Even if Bal'amī had entrusted the work's composition to a scriptorium, it is not evident why this would have produced such divergent texts, for presumably each scribe would have been told to work on a separate part of the text. To accept Rawshan's theory, one must believe that Bal'amī would have set different scribes to translate the same passage in direct competition with one another. It is by no means obvious why anyone would do this. Furthermore, to argue that a group of scribes was responsible directly contradicts the evidence of

36 Thus for example the account of Yazdagird's death differs substantially in Bodleian, Laud Or 323; Bodleian, Elliot 377; RAS, Persian 22, and Edirne, İl Halk Kütüphanesi, Selimiye 1036, although all give it roughly similar headings.

37 Tehran, Kitābkhāna-i Majlis, 2291 for instance lacks many section headings. Süleymaniye, Fatih 4281 recounts under the appropriate chapter headings the conversion of Abū Bakr (f. 176a) and 'Umar (f. 176b) but does not have another heading until f. 182b, dealing with the Prophet's journey to Ṭā'if after Abū Ṭālib's death. In other manuscripts such as Süleymaniye, Aya Sofya 3051, the intervening events, which are nonetheless included in Fatih 4281, are given separate headings: *Khabar-i Āshkārā Kardan-i Da'vat* and *Hijrat Kardan-i Yārān-i Payghambar 'Alayh al-Salām bi-Ḥabasha.* See *Tārīkhnāma,* V, p. 1332 for details of some other manuscripts. Likewise, British Library, Add 23,496 (f. 21 a) includes the account of Gayūmarth under *Ḥadīth Idrīs 'Alayh al-Salām* rather than giving it a separate title. Meanwhile, British Library, Or 5344, unusually, divides the account of Gayūmarth under two section headings: *Faṣl dar Dhikr-i Mulk-i Gayūmarth* and *Dhikr-i Mujmalī-yi Vaqā'i'-i Zamān-i Mulk-i Gayūmarth va Kushta Shudan-i Ba'ḍī-yi Awlād-i ū bar Dast-i Shayāṭīn* (f. 19b), although admittedly these accounts are rather different from those found elsewhere.

38 *Tārīkhnāma,* I, *Muqaddima,* p. 42.

39 Ibid, I, *Muqaddima,* p. 47.

40 Ibid, I, *Muqaddima,* p. 39ff.

41 D.Morgan, *The Mongols,* Oxford: B Blackwell, 1986, p. 21; T.Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 85.

both the Arabic and Persian introductions to the work. The author of the Arabic introduction, probably the original one as Griaznevich and Boldyrev argued, repeatedly uses the first person singular to describe how he set about making the translation: 'I translated it… I asked God for help in composing it, compiling it and finishing it.'[42] The Persian preface quotes Balʿamī as saying, 'I exerted myself and strove and translated it into Persian by the power of God.'[43] Thus previous scholars' conclusions about the textual history of the *Tārīkhnāma* are unsatisfactory, and I offer here a new explanation of the problem.

## The genesis of the Persian text of the *Tārīkhnāma*

It is possible that Balʿamī composed and circulated more than one version of his work, which might account for some of the differences in the text. However, one would expect the *Tārīkhnāma* to have been published in a final form during his lifetime: as it was a state-sponsored project, Balʿamī's pattern of work is less likely to have been subject to his own whims than is the case with a private scholar such as Ibn al-Athīr, and there was plenty of time for the translation to be completed before the vizier's death. Balʿamī may have presented a draft version to his patron for approval, as Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī claims to have done with his fourth/tenth century *Risāla*,[44] but even if it was subsequently revised, there is no reason why he or the state would have wanted unauthorized, sometimes contradictory, variants to circulate either before or after his death. Nonetheless, Bayḍāwī's *Niẓām al-Tawārīkh*, another history composed to meet a political agenda, circulated in at least two different versions during its author's lifetime,[45] so we cannot exclude the possibility that this happened with the *Tārīkhnāma* too.

Even if we do accept that variant drafts may have been circulated in the Sāmānid period, this is unquestionably not the whole story, for even a cursory examination reveals obvious interpolations in the manuscripts for which Balʿamī could not have been responsible. For instance, the terminus of the manuscripts varies considerably, and many continue up to the reigns of caliphs who acceded long after Balʿamī's death such as Mustarshid (d. 529/1135).[46] Such interpolations are the work of mediaeval scribes who were anxious to improve the text in accordance with the tastes and interests of their day. This was most frequently done by comparing the *Tārīkhnāma* with other texts and adding missing passages from them in a process analogous to collation.

42 *Tārīkhnāma,* I, pp. 2–3: *'anā utarjimuhu…wa-sa'altu allāh ta'ālā al-tawfīq fī ta'līfihi…'*
43 Ibid, II, p. 856.
44 Abū Dulaf, *Vtoraia zapiska Abū Dulafa,* P.T.Bulgakov and A.B.Khalidov (eds), Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Vostochnoi Literatury, 1960, text p. 6.
45 See C.Melville, 'From Adam to Abaqa: Qāḍī Baiḍāwī's rearrangement of history. Part II', *Studia Iranica* forthcoming. I am very grateful to Charles Melville for allowing me a preview of this article.
46 Among the many examples of such manuscripts are RAS Persian 22 (Mustarshid); Süleymaniye, Fatih 4281 (Muqtadī, d. 487/1094), Aya Sofya 3054 (Mustaẓhir, d. 512/1118).

Mediaeval Muslim scribes commonly sought to ensure the accuracy of their texts by collating different manuscripts. Occasionally they left evidence for this in statements in colophons or margins, and sometimes scribal markings indicate the number of manuscripts used in collating the text. The practice was obligatory for *ḥadīth*, the religious and legal importance of which required the most reliable texts possible, but its use seems to have spread through the great translation movement of Greek and Syriac works, mainly philosophical, into Arabic (second/eighth to fourth/tenth centuries).[47] The translators had swiftly realized that their work was impossible without accurate editions of the originals, and were often obliged to establish the texts themselves. For instance, Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq, the movement's most famous figure, states that he collated Greek manuscripts for his translation of Galen.[48]

In the case of the Balʿamī manuscripts, collation took on a far more radical form. Some scribes did not stop at collating other Balʿamī manuscripts, but used the original Arabic of Ṭabarī as well.[49] In an analogous step, scribes started to supplement their text with passages from other works such as the Arabic history of Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī,[50] Iranian national histories such as the *Kitāb-i Akhbār-i ʿAjam* (mentioned as the source for the Bahrām Chūbīn accounts in RAS, Persian 22 and others),[51] and Zoroastrian accounts.[52] By using such works, scribes hoped to fill in gaps they found in the work in accordance with their patrons' interests. Sometimes the *Tārīkhnāma's* text will be followed by an appendix, such as a geographical or chronological treatise, providing a historical update to the scribe's own day. This reaches its most extreme form in Bodleian, Elliot 377, in which the *Tārīkhnāma* occupies only about half the manuscript, the remainder being an extract from Rashīd al-Dīn's *Jāmiʿ al-Tawārīkh*. This editorial activity resulted in the hybrid and sometimes confused text (or texts) we have today. The scribes had a precedent for this procedure, for Balʿamī himself states in his Arabic preface (if it is authentic, as seems likely) that he compared his work with Ṭabarī's

47 A.Gacek, 'Technical practices and recommendations recorded by classical and post-classical Arabic scholars concerning the copying and correction of manuscripts' in F.Déroche (ed.), *Les manuscrits du Moyen-Orient: essais de codicologie et de paléographie. Actes du colloque d'Istanbul (Istanbul 26–29 mai 1986)*, Istanbul and Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1989, p. 51.
48 See L.D.Reynolds and N.G.Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: a guide to the transmission of Greek and Latin literature*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1991, p. 57.
49 This is also comparable to Ḥunayn's procedure in translating Galen's *Peri haireseôn tois eisagomenois*, for which he used both the Greek and Syriac versions to produce the Arabic: 'A number of Greek manuscripts had accumulated in my possession. I collated these manuscripts and produced a single correct copy. Next, I collated the Syriac text with it and corrected it. I am in the habit of doing this with everything I translate.' Cited in F.Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (tr. E. & J. Marmorstein), London: Routledge, 1975, p. 20.
50 See Chapter 3.
51 *Tārīkhnāma*, II, p. 764.
52 Ibid, I, p. 93.

*Tafsīr* (*uqābiluhu bi-'l-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*).[53] Later copyists too seem to have used the *Tafsīr* as a source: passages in some manuscripts of the *Tārīkhnāma* were evidently lifted directly from the *Tafsīr*. For instance, in RAS, Persian 22's account of the raid on Tabūk, which is extremely close to the version given by the Persian *Tafsīr*, a verse from *al-Tawba* (Q. 9.42) is quoted in Arabic and translated into Persian, after which is found the comment that 'most of this *sūra, al-Tawba,* was sent down concerning this raid'.[54] Yet there is no other discussion of the *sūra,* which makes the comment seem rather disconnected from the narrative. An identical phrase is found in the *Tafsīr* in the commentary on *al-Tawba* where it fits in appropriately.[55] Similarly, in the section on the answers given by the Prophet to the Jews' questions about the Torah, which is remarkably similar in both the *Tafsīr* and the *Tārīkhnāma,* both quote the Qur'ānic verses *Qul huwa Allāh aḥad, Allāh al-ṣamad* (Q. 112.1–2.) The *Tārīkhnāma* adds, 'much has been said on the *tafsīr* of this, but this is a history book'.[56] Sure enough, the *Tafsīr* contains a few additional paragraphs on this verse, but then the text of both works is virtually the same.[57] These passages are not to be found in probably the oldest extant text, the fifth/eleventh century Arabic translation of the *Tārīkhnāma* preserved in Cambridge University Library, Add 836 (discussed below), and the lack of integration of the references to the *Tafsīr* does suggest that interpolation is responsible for their presence. Thus later scribes felt no incongruity in continuing to use the *Tafsīr* as a source from which to supplement or amend Bal'amī's text.

This aspect of the transmission of the *Tārīkhnāma* has not been considered previously, which is why other explanations of the state of the manuscripts are unsatisfactory. Traditional explanations assume that the manuscripts of a given redaction are descended from a single parent and their texts share similar omissions and interpolations—a process known as Vertical transmission'. Thus manuscripts can be grouped into redactions on the basis of their common textual features. However, in fact the *Tārīkhnāma* seems to present a case of horizontal transmission. Copyists would consult not one but a number of manuscripts from which they would collate their text, which is why it is often impossible to identify enough consistent common features in manuscripts to classify them convincingly into redactions.[58] For instance, in RAS, Persian 22, Farīdūn's son's name is written as both Tūj and Tūr within the space of a couple of lines.[59] Such inconsistencies can only be explained as a result of the scribe's eye wandering between two or more manuscripts in front of him. Even more extreme is the case of Tashkent, Beruniy, 4226,

53 Ibid, I, p. 2.
54 Ibid, III, p. 285.
55 *Tarjuma-i Tafsīr-i Ṭabarī*, Ḥ Yaghmā'ī (ed.), Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 2536, III, p. 650.
56 *Tārīkhnāma,* I, p. 17.
57 *Tarjuma-i Tafsīr-i Ṭabarī*, I, p. 30.
58 I have adapted this idea of horizontal transmission from Reynolds and Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars,* p. 214ff.
59 Ibid, I, p. 107.

where the scribe has two different accounts of the reign of Jamshīd. The first, entitled *Dhikr-i Pādishāhī-yi Jamshīd*[60] resembles closely the account in RAS Persian 22. The second, entitled *Guftār dar Dhikr-i Pādishāhī-yi Jam,*[61] differs slightly, but it is clear that the scribe is unaware that both accounts are dealing with one and the same individual. Thinking the different accounts he found in different manuscripts were about separate kings and confused by the variant of the name, he included both in his text. Scribes occasionally give direct evidence of the practice of collation. Just before the colophon of a manuscript from the Bodleian (Ouseley 206–8), the scribe mentions that he has seen alternative versions of the text of the chapters dealing with ʿAbbāsid history. He notes that in some manuscripts there is no account of the rebellion of the Qarāmiṭa, while some finish with the Caliphate of Muʿtaṣim (d. 227/842).[62]

It should be noted that there does not appear to be any consistency in the application of collation to either the *Shāhnāma,* another text with a complex manuscript tradition,[63] or Balʿamī's *Tārīkhnāma*. The problem with the *Shāhnāma* is complicated by the obtrusion of versions from oral sources, and it is possible that at least some passages in the Balʿamī manuscripts came into existence in a similar way, although this is rarely possible to prove. Some passages were clearly omitted or included according to the political or religious allegiances of the copyist or his patron. For example, most manuscripts have a section on ʿUthmān's lineage, wives, and number of children, following the account of his murder. However, the scribe of RAS, Persian 22, who was clearly very hostile to the Caliph and interpolates negative comments about him, entirely omits this section. Yet his hostility did not prevent him from occasional inconsistencies, and occasionally the laudatory formula *raḍiya Allāh ʿanhu* slips in after ʿUthmān's name, copied automatically from whatever manuscript he was using. In other cases it is harder to establish such an obvious cause for the presence, absence or form of certain episodes, but we may surmise that the political circumstances under which the manuscript was written may frequently have been influential. As relatively few manuscripts give us precise details of their date and place of copying, let alone of the patron who commissioned them, establishing the nature of such circumstances is extremely difficult.

60 Tashkent, Beruniy, 4226, f. 18b.

61 Ibid, f. 19b. The second account includes far more details about Jamshīd's inventions, but omits the story of his temptation by Iblīs generally found elsewhere. The same chapter heading also covers the prophethood of Noah in this manuscript. There is no acknowledgement on the scribe's part that he is providing two different accounts, and indeed he dates 'Jam' and 'Jamshīd' to different periods. According to him Jamshīd succeeds Gayūmarth, and then come Bīvarasap, Ṭahmūrath and Jam.

62 Oxford, Bodleian, Ouseley 208, f. 552a.

63 See Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh,* Dj.Khaleghi-Motlagh (ed.), New York: Mazda, 1988, I, *Pīshguftār*, pp. 19–20.

iven the lack of early manuscript evidence, it is impossible to be certain when interpolations started to enter the Persian manuscript tradition. Boldyrev and Griaznevich attributed many of the alterations to the text to an editor working in Bukhārā at the end of the fourth/tenth century,[64] but there is no evidence for the existence of this individual. The sixth/twelfth century Mashhad manuscript already shows evidence of interpolation.[65] There appears to be much less interpolation in the probably fifth/eleventh century text of the *Tārīkhnāma's* Arabic translation, but we know nothing about the Persian manuscript from which the translation was made which could have dated from either the fourth/tenth or fifth/eleventh centuries. At any rate, it is clear that the processes of alteration and interpolation started at an early date.

Horizontal transmission is thus the reason that even the vague groupings of manuscripts proposed by previous scholars do not stand up to detailed scrutiny, and establishing anything resembling a conventional stemma is impossible.[66] Unfortunately, identifying which passages are original and which interpolated is rarely possible. In RAS, Persian 22's account of Ḍaḥḥāk a clear example occurs, in the form of a passage with little connection to the one before it or after it which interrupts the narrative. The author is describing the circumstances of Kāva's rebellion against the tyrant Ḍaḥḥāk who had ordered two men to be killed each day to make a salve for his ulcers from their brains, and writes,

> In the land of Iṣfahān lived a farmer in a village who had two grown-up sons. Ḍaḥḥāk's governor in Iṣfahān seized the sons and sent them to him, and he ordered them to be killed. Their father's name was Kāva, and when he heard the news, his patience was exhausted and he entered the town, crying out and shouting. He tied an ironmonger's apron around a stick to make a flag and cried out. *The people were oppressed by Ḍaḥḥāk, who had a cook who did as follows, for his heart was sore for them and because of the great slaughter. Every day of the two men [he was meant to kill] he took one and killed him and mixed sheep's brain with him and used it. The other he hid underground, and when he had got ten or fifteen he released them by night, and told them not to live in towns but in deserts and mountains, so that no one could recapture them. They say the Kurds and Hashm are descended from them. When the oppression*

64 Griaznevich and Boldyrev, 'O dvukh redaktsiiakh "Ta'rīkh-i Ṭabarī" Bal'amī', p. 58.
65 See n. 68 below.
66 The difficulty of establishing stemmata in Middle Eastern texts represented by numerous extant manuscripts has often been noted. See for example, J.J.Witkam's comments on Ibn al-Akfānī's *Irshād al-Qāṣid* in his 'Establishing the stemma: fact or fiction?', *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 3(1988), p. 95: 'I have collated significant passages, but was not, in the event, able to establish a stemma on the basis of the material available to me. Only on a few occasions could I prove the direct relationship between two manuscripts, whereby the more recent one could be eliminated.' This is exactly the same problem as with Bal'amī.

> *became great and Kāva's sons were seized, he cried out*, saying, 'How long shall we stand this oppression? Who is there who will help me to save this people from oppression and cruelty?' They gathered round him and many people agreed to help.[67]

It is obvious that the text in italics interrupts the narrative, and indeed it is omitted from the more conservative text of Add 836. Interpolations are, however, not usually so evident, although there are occasional clues. Scribes sometimes even consulted Ṭabarī's original Arabic text as a source for variant accounts. In one instance, the Mashhad manuscript explicitly contrasts Ṭabarī's and Balʿamī's accounts, indicating that the copyist had access to both texts in some form.[68] Ṭabarī's Arabic text continued to be consulted even after the eighth/fourteenth century, when the low number of manuscripts that have survived in contrast to earlier centuries suggest its popularity was waning. For example, the incipit of British Library Or 5343 uses a slightly abridged version of Ṭabarī's exordium rather than that usually found in the *Tārīkhnāma*.[69] This was probably introduced in the the tenth/sixteenth or eleventh/seventeenth century when the original eighth/fourteenth century manuscript was repaired; presumably the later scribe was aware of the difference between the Arabic and Persian texts and decided to 'correct' the latter. This constant process of correction and adaptation of Balʿamī's text resulted in its chaotic state.

One of the most difficult problems remains: the passages which the manuscript falsely states are not to be found in Ṭabarī.[70] The implications of such statements are serious, for they suggest either that Balʿamī is lying (for no immediately obvious reason) or that the text of Ṭabarī at his disposal was radically different from its current form, either because the latter is corrupt or because Balʿamī's manuscripts of Ṭabarī were unreliable. It seems highly unlikely that he would have been working from defective manuscripts, given that he was vizier of one of the most powerful and cultured Muslim states of the day, working on the translation project by order of the ruler.[71] It is doubtful

67 *Tārīkhnāma,* I, p. 103.

68 Balʿamī, *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, p. 388.

69 In contrast to the other *Tārīkhnāma* manuscripts with an Arabic preface, which start *al-ḥamd lillāh al-ʿalī al-aʿlā al-wali al-awlā*, it starts *al-ḥamd lillāh al-awwal qabl kull awwal*. Daniel ('Manuscripts and editions', p. 298, n. 50) lists two other manuscripts with this beginning, Leningrad, Dorn 266 and Hyderabad, Sālār Jang 149, which I have not inspected.

70 For a discussion of this problem with examples, see E.Daniel, 'Balʿamī's account of early Islamic history' in F.Daftary and J.Meri (eds), *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: essays in honour of Wilferd Madelung*, London: I.B.Tauris, 2003, pp. 166–8. For instance some manuscripts claim that Ṭabarī omitted any account of the Battle of Badr, whereas in fact the version in the Leiden edition of Ṭabarī is more extensive than that found in the Persian manuscripts.

71 E.Daniel, The Samanid "Translations" of Tabari' in H.Kennedy (ed.), *Al-Ṭabarī: a medieval Muslim historian and his work*, Princeton: Darwin Press, forthcoming.

that the text of Ṭabarī would have become particularly corrupt a mere forty years after the author's death, especially given that Musabbiḥī, who died just over 100 years after Ṭabarī, apparently managed to gain access to an autograph copy of the *History*.[72]

Admittedly, it is difficult to assess the accuracy of the surviving text of Ṭabarī, as it does not survive in any single complete manuscript and de Goeje's edition is based on a number of manuscripts, originating in very different places, of individual parts of the work. However, the Cairo edition by Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, which is based on a few additional manuscripts, has not served to change our impression of the text substantially. Moreover, for many parts of the text of the *History*, multiple manuscripts exist, and the critical apparatuses presented by Ibrāhīm and de Goeje do not indicate that the text was ever subjected to the widespread alteration that the *Tārīkhnāma* was. The internal evidence of the Persian and Arabic texts also provides good reason to believe the text of the History that Balʿamī used was reasonably close to that available today. Passages quoted in Arabic in the *Tārīkhnāma* that can be compared to the text given by Ṭabarī, such as the *sajʿ* exchanges between Musaylima and Sajāḥ[73] and some of the poetry, demonstrate that the text at Balʿamī's disposal was extremely close to that reconstructed by de Goeje et al. and Ibrāhīm. It therefore seems justifiable to treat Ṭabarī's text as reasonably accurate—or at least free of problems on the scale of those affecting Balʿamī.

We must therefore conclude that these comments in the *Tārīkhnāma* are somewhat disingenuous. In fact, they may frequently refer to defects in the Persian manuscripts from which the scribes were copying. Scribes would therefore correct this fault from other manuscripts at their disposal, or even the Arabic original. It may appear perplexing that these manuscripts blame Ṭabarī rather than—Balʿamī or careless scribes—for omissions, but copyists did not make a strict distinction between the Arabic and Persian texts, as their use of Ṭabarī for collation indicates. Indeed, many manuscripts with the Arabic preface start with 'Muḥammad b. Jarīr [Ṭabarī] said in the *khuṭba* of his book…' and proceed to praise God in phraseology completely different from that in Ṭabarī, followed by a preface written by Balʿamī in the first person.

Thus some of these complaints of Ṭabarī's text being incomplete are doubtless the work of later copyists. Yet Balʿamī himself evidently also found the Arabic *History* inadequate in places, and there are several prominent passages where he openly contradicts Ṭabarī. In the following two chapters we shall examine how Balʿamī adapted Ṭabarī's text and why his version differs so substantially from the Arabic original. Firstly, however, we must examine our earliest evidence for Balʿamī's text, the Arabic translation, which will be used as one of the tools for studying the *Tārīkhnāma* in this book.

72 Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, p. 110.
73 These are discussed in Chapter 4.

### The anonymous Arabic translation of the *Tārīkhnāma*

The anonymous Arabic translation of the *Tārīkhnāma* is preserved in three manuscripts. These are: an extremely late (c.1800) fragment in Berlin that contains the Islamic part of the text (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Orientabteilung, Sprenger 45);[74] Leiden University Library, Or 3103, a manuscript which is no later than the ninth/fifteenth century and may be eighth/fourteenth century;[75] and, most importantly, Cambridge University Library, Add 836. The date of completion of the latter manuscript is recorded as Tuesday, 26 Jumādā 'l-Ākhira, 876/10 December 1471, but according to the colophon it is a copy of a manuscript dated 627/1230, itself a copy of one dated 442/1050. If true, this means Add 836 is a direct descendant of a manuscript copied only 90 years after Balʿamī was writing, and thus offers a much older text than the extant Persian manuscripts. The differences between the text of the Berlin, Leiden and Cambridge manuscripts are minimal, being limited to small copying errors. There is no evidence of widescale alteration or interpolation as in the Persian manuscripts.

The significance of this Arabic translation of Balʿamī is not just its antiquity. In many respects it seems to offer a much more conservative, and thus more reliable, text than the Persian manuscripts do. The repetitions and variant accounts that may be found in the Persian manuscripts are absent here, and while it does include Arabic poetry, this is rather less common than in other version of the text. Explicit criticisms of Ṭabarī are also somewhat rarer than in other manuscripts. I shall base my discussion on Add 836 as this is the only manuscript for which we have information about the circumstances of its copying and which can be traced back to a fifth/eleventh century original. The details of the text (except for the colo phon) are generally the same in the other two manuscripts. The beginning of the text is missing in all three manuscripts, although the original table of contents is preserved in Leiden University Library, Or 3103.

### The date and circumstances of copying of Add 836

Unfortunately, the provenance and date of Add 836 are somewhat problematic. The manuscript measures 27.8 by 17 cm, has 27 lines per page and 238 folios, is written on low-quality unwatermarked oriental paper, and its script is an inelegant *nastaʿlīq*. The unornamented, somewhat battered, black leather binding is possibly a result of later

74 See W.Ahlwardt, *Verzeichniss der arabischen Handschriften der königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*, Berlin: A.W.Schade, 1887–99, no. 9424.
75 This is the view of Dr. J.J.Witkam of Leiden, who kindly examined the manuscript and suggested this date (personal communication, March 2003). I am very grateful to Dr Witkam for his opinion. The manuscript lacks a proper colophon, so there is no date given.

repair work. It is evident that the manuscript was not destined for a wealthy patron, but was prepared for a provincial audience. The name of the scribe is given as Bāyazīd b. Ṣadr al-Dīn b. Khiḍr Khaṭīb.[76] The last, damaged folio contains after the colophon a reference to some *naqībs* of Kūfa in Iraq, the leaders of the Shīʿite community there. It is likely that the copyist had Shīʿite sympathies, at least, and was in some way connected with the family of *naqībs*. The latter are mentioned in Ibn ʿInaba's *ʿUmdat al-Ṭālib fī Ansāb ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib* down to the father of the first member of the family listed in Add 836, Muḥammad b. Abī ʾl-Ḥasan ʿAlī.[77] It does not seem that this family was responsible for commissioning the copy of the manuscript, for another individual whose name is illegible is mentioned as its owner (*ṣāḥibuhu* wa-mālikuhu). It seems likely that these *naqībs* were significant to the copyist because he himself was a Shīʿite resident of Kūfa, as was his patron. By the ninth/fifteenth century, Kūfa had declined into being a half-ruined, insignificant town,[78] which helps to explain the low-quality, provincial characteristics of Add 836.

More information about Bāyazīd b. Ṣadr al-Dīn b. Khiḍr's background is hinted at in some remarks made just after the colophon, although unfortunately the manuscript is severely damaged at this point. Firstly, the scribe recounts a *ḥadīth* attributed to the prophet which discusses the status of the ulema and the utility of knowledge. This is intriguing because it mentions twice a village called Afrankad, which was near Samarqand.[79] Although the manuscript is too damaged to allow an exact understanding of the significance of this reference, it suggests that the copyist had a connection with Transoxiana as well as Iraq. This is confirmed by a second anecdote which recounts how, after the Muslim conquest, the people of Bukhārā, Samarqand and Turkistan were willing to curse the ʿAlids, and only the people of

76 I have not been able to trace any of these individuals.

77 Ibn 'Inaba, *'Umdat al-Ṭālib fī Ansāb Āl Abī Ṭālib*, J. Āl al-Ṭāliqānī (ed.), Najaf: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Ḥaydariyya, 1381, p. 31 1ff.

78 H.Djaït, 'Kūfa' in *EI2*, V, pp. 345–351.

79 *Qandiyya: dar bayān-i mazārāt-i Samarqand*, Ī. Afshār (ed.), Tehran: Ṭāhūrī, 1334/1955, p. 23.

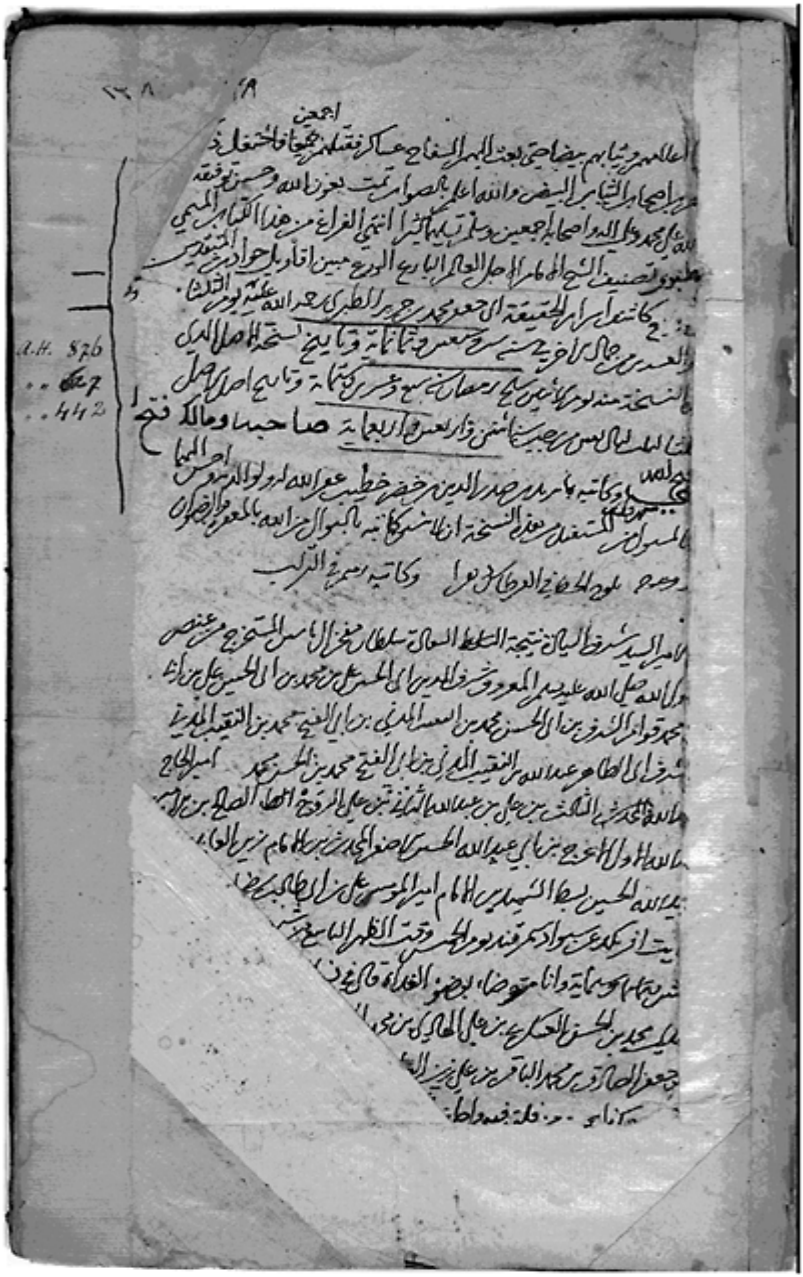

*Figure 2.1* The colophon of Cambridge University Library, MS Add 836

Khwārazm refused, for which they suffered greatly. As its mention alongside the other great cities of Transoxiana indicates, the Turkistan referred to here is not the territory of Central Asia as a whole, but the town of Turkistan in the south of modern Kazakhstan where there is a great shrine to the Ṣūfī saint Aḥmad Yasavī. Until the ninth/fifteenth century, it was known as Yasī, but as the shrine developed into a major pilgrimage centre with the encouragement of the Tīmūrid dynasty, its name changed to the one used here.[80] The attribution of Shīʿism to the Khwārazmians is surprising, for Khwārazm has always been considered a strongly Sunnī region. The folio concludes with some remarks condemning the useless acquisition of knowledge for knowledge's sake.

It seems likely that Bāyazīd b. Ṣadr al-Dīn was a Shīʿite Central Asian. This is suggested by the anecdote and *ḥadīth* that indicate that the copyist had detailed local knowledge of Central Asia—Afrankad, for instance, does not seem to have been a place of any note, and extensive research has failed to uncover any references to it other than that cited above. Bāyazīd is a name more typical of a Central Asian Turk than a Kūfan Arab. It remains, then, to suggest a hypothesis for the manuscript's Iraqi connection. Central Asia in the ninth/fifteenth century, as in earlier times, was strongly Sunnī, so it would have been natural for a Shīʿite to leave for the more sympathetic environment of Iraq, perhaps to make a pilgrimage to great Shīʿite shrines there. The scribe's remarks on the Shīʿism of the Khwārazmians may have been designed to convince his Kūfan audience of the piety of at least some of his compatriots.

However, two facts require caution before firmly attributing the provenance of the manuscript to ninth/fifteenth century Kūfa. Firstly, the great Orientalist E.G.Browne suggested that the manuscript was of a later date than that mentioned in its colophon.[81] Secondly, a note in English on the manuscript's flyleaf states that it is 'An Indian MS retranslated from the Persian', although it does not elucidate this statement any further. Firstly, we shall consider the question of the manuscript's date, then that of provenance.

Unfortunately, but understandably, almost all research into Arabic palaeography and paper-making has concentrated on examples of especially antiquity, quality or interest. The production of low-quality manuscripts for provincial audiences has as yet not proved to be an attractive research topic. Our knowledge of the development of Arabic palaeography is thus still limited.[82] *Nastaʿlīq*, popular in the eastern Islamic world, was formed out of a merging of the *naskh* and *taʿlīq* styles in the eighth/fourteenth century, becoming widespread during the ninth/fifteenth, and already everyday *naskh* handwriting had begun to take on the characteristics *nastaʿlīq*.[83] This does not tell us anything we did not know: that the manuscript is not older than the ninth/fifteenth century and that the copyist was a native of the Islamic east. The script used in Add 836 has some features of

80 W.Barthold and C.E.Bosworth, 'Turkistan. 3' in *EI2*, X, p. 679.
81 E.G.Browne, *A Handlist of the Muhammadan Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Cambridge*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900, p. 32.
82 See J.Sourdel-Thomine, 'Khaṭṭ' in *EI2*, IV, pp. 1117–18.
83 G.-Ḥ. Yūsofī, 'Calligraphy' in *EIr*, IV, pp. 696–7.

Indian *nastaʿlīq*, but which are also attested much further west where it originated.[84] The technique of making cheap paper remained the same for hundreds of years, and continued into the nineteenth century in India and Central Asia, although elsewhere in the Islamic world European paper had become prevalent.[85] It is thus difficult to come to a definite conclusion as to the date and provenance of the manuscript on purely technical grounds, and while these do not preclude a ninth/fifteenth century Iraqi provenance, they also leave open plenty of other possibilities as to place and date of copying. The paper is unlikely to be Indian, for paper in Muslim India was generally made out of sunn hemp rather than linen rags as in the rest of the Islamic world.[86] In addition, whatever the nature of the script and paper, both copyists and paper could travel, and Central Asia, India and Iran were closely linked by trade and culture.[87]

Several features of the manuscript do, however, indicate a ninth/fifteenth century Kūfan provenance. Arabic colloquialisms are occasionally employed in the text,[88] indicating an origin within the Arab world, and the very nature of the text, an obscure abridgement of Ṭabarī, an author not widely known in India,[89] suggest it is more likely to have originated outside the subcontinent. The fact that Ibn ʿInaba (d. 828/1424) also mentions Muḥammad b. Abī ʾl-Ḥasan, who presumably was alive during the former's lifetime, gives credence to the ninth/fifteenth century dating, for there is no obvious reason why someone in a later period wanting to produce a forgery would use an obscure dynasty of *naqībs* to bolster the authenticity of the text. Moreover, if, as Browne suggests, the manuscript is later in date than it purports to be, we are faced with the difficulty of explaining why the scribe would falsify the date. Scribes commonly did seek to increase the value of manuscripts by introducing spurious antique dates into their colophons.[90] Among Balʿamī manuscripts, for example, Tashkent, Beruniy, 2816 and 4226 purport to be sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries respectively, while they

84 P.Soucek, 'The arts of calligraphy' in B.Gray (ed.) *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia, 14th–16th centuries*, London: Serindia, 1979, pp. 24, 27, esp. illustration 12 (British Library, Or 13,297, a *Khamsa* of Niẓāmī copied in Baghdad in 788/1386).

85 F.Déroche, *Manuel de codicologie de manuscripts en écriture arabe*, Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 2000, pp. 63–5.

86 On Islamic paper in general, see H.Loveday, *Islamic Paper: a study of the ancient craft*, London: Don Baker Memorial Fund, 2001; on Indian paper specifically, see N.Macfarlane, *Handmade Papers of India*, Winchester: Alembic Press, 1987.

87 See, for example, L.Dadkhudoeva, *Khudozhestvennaia Kulʾtura Knigi Srednei Azii i Indii XVI–XIX vekov*, Dushanbe: Akademiia Nauk Respubliki Tadzhikistan, 2000, esp. pp. 161–179.

88 E.g. f. 39a, David asks the angel Gabriel, *'Aysh taṣnaʿ bi-Ūriyyā yawm al-qiyāma?'* using the colloquial form *aysh* to mean 'what' rather than the classical *mā* or *mādhā*. Add 836 often uses such colloquialisms in dialogue, but rarely elsewhere.

89 Sezgin notes only three Ṭabarī manuscripts from the entire subcontinent, a fraction of the number to be found in Istanbul alone. See ibid, *Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums*, Leiden: Brill, 1967, I, p. 326.

90 E.g. see A.Soudavar, 'The concepts of "*al-aqdamo aṣaḥḥ*" and *"yaqīn-e sābeq"* and the problem of semi-fakes', *Studia Iranica* 28(1999), pp. 260–266; ibid, 'Forgeries I.' in *EIr*, X, pp. 90–93 and F.Richard, 'Forgeries IV. Of Islamic manuscripts' in *EIr*, X, pp. 97–100.

clearly both date from the eleventh/seventeenth and twelfth/eighteenth centuries. Yet it was never common practice to forge the date of copying of a manuscript and then to assert that this was two further removes from the original copy, as would be the case here. Indeed it would be hard to comprehend the motive for such a claim. A scribe might well pretend to have copied a manuscript directly from a fifth/eleventh century original, but there could be no pecuniary advantage in claiming to have copied a later copy of an earlier original. It is equally unlikely that a scribe would have copied a later version and then ascribed a false, but late, date to his own copy.

The margins of the manuscript contain one further comment which is of use in dating the manuscript. A marginal note, in Arabic, in a later hand on f. 66a, beside the account of Muḥammad's youth, states that the Meccans had continued the practice of sending their children out to wet-nurses up to the year 1039/1629–30. Such a date is likely to refer to an event that had occurred during the lifetime of the current owner of the manuscript, and probably it was something he himself had noticed, perhaps while on the *ḥajj*. This means that even if we adopt Browne's scepticism as to the veracity of the colophon, the manuscript must have been produced before the early eleventh/seventeenth century.

It seems likely, on balance, that Browne was mistaken. As he himself admits in the introduction to his *Handlist*, he lacked enthusiasm for the monumental and tedious task of cataloguing all the Islamic manuscripts in Cambridge University Library single-handedly, and doubtless did not examine every manuscript in detail.[91] He was possibly misled by some later folios attached to the beginning of the manuscript containing an index to the work which clearly date to the nineteenth century. The references to Turkistan and to the *naqībs* of Kūfa both accord with a ninth/fifteenth century date, and as argued above, there is no reason why these would have interested anyone but the immediate audience for whom the manuscript was copied. Even if we incline to attributing it to a later date, the fact that these references have been preserved intact supports the accuracy of the copy. At any rate, the existence of Leiden Or 3103 indicates that the Arabic translation of Balʿamī was in circulation in this period.

We must now examine the question of the manuscript's Indian connection. It is impossible to trace the provenance of Add 836 exactly. The first definite record of it comes with its acquisition by Cambridge University Library from the collection of the Rev. Prof. H.G.Williams, Sir Thomas Adams's Professor of Arabic and Fellow of Emmanuel College, after his death in 1870. It seems unlikely, if not impossible, from the limited information available about Williams, that he ever visited the East himself.[92] It is therefore probable that he acquired the manuscript from a British official, recently returned from a colonial posting in the East, or from a sale of manuscripts at auction. It is thus very likely that the manuscript did indeed come from India to Cambridge. In many places, marginal comments or glosses in Persian (e.g. ff. 14a, 37b, 47a, 75b, 112a, 113a among others) have been added to Add 836. Persian was always more widespread in

91 Browne, *Handlist*, pp. vii–viii.

92 The plotted biographies of Williams in *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, Boase, and *Crockford's* all indicate that he spent a quiet career as a clergyman and academic, becoming deacon of Ely in 1842, rector of Preston from 1854, and Professor of Arabic from 1854 until his death in 1870.

India than Arabic, and it is entirely credible that these notes were added there. Indeed, that Add 836 should have passed through India is less surprising than it may appear at first.

There are two possible routes by which the manuscript may have reached the subcontinent. The best-known route for the penetration of Islamic influences is through Central Asia, which may have been the original home of the scribe of Add 836. Assuming that Bāyazīd b. Ṣadr al-Dīn's patron was indeed Kūfan, this does not provide an explanation of how it got from Kūfa back to Central Asia and then to India. A more tempting suggestion is that it was taken directly from Iraq to India, probably to the Deccan. India had extensive links to the Arab world alongside its better-known connections with Central Asia and Persia. Arab émigrés had always been employed by the Sultanate of Delhi, at the Mughal court and especially in the Deccani Sultanates, so much so that the eleventh/seventeenth century Deccan has been described as 'the greatest centre of Arabic learning and literary composition outside the Levant'.[93] Some Arab migrant may have brought the manuscript to India, quite possibly the Deccan which was under Shī'ite rule from the tenth/sixteenth century, making it a tempting place for an Iraqi co-religionist to settle.[94] Indeed, the Quṭb Shāhī dynasty of the Deccan was in fact descended from the Qaraquyunlu dynasty that ruled in Iran and Iraq until a couple of years before the copying of Add 836.[95] Thus explaining the Iraqi-Indian connections of the manuscript does not pose a great problem.

The evidence cited above suggests that, whatever its scribe's origins, Add 836 was written in ninth/fifteenth century Kūfa, as indicated by the colophon. Yet even more important than the provenance of Add 836 are the questions of how closely its text reproduces that of its fifth/eleventh century original, and of how accurate a translation of Bal'amī's *Tārīkhnāma* this was. Unfortunately, these questions are extremely difficult to answer, but we shall examine them in the next section.

## The contents of Add 836 and its reliability

As we lack the original manuscript the Arabic translator of Bal'amī used, it is impossible to assess with certainty the accuracy of his translation. However, we can get some idea of it by comparing the text of Add 836 with parts of the text of the Persian manuscripts that seem to be preserved with relatively little variation in other manuscripts. While this is by no means an entirely satisfactory tool, it is the best one available. Appendix II presents the text and translation of two passages in their Arabic and Persian

93 W.Dalrymple, *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India*, London: Harper Collins, 2002, p. 26.

94 The most famous of these dynasties was the Quṭb-Shāhīs. For details of the role of Arabic language and literature in the Deccan in this period see H.K.Sherwani, *History of the Quṭb-Shāhī Dynasty*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1974, p. 535ff.

95 V.Minorsky, 'The Qara-Qoyimlu and the Quṭb-Shāhs', BSOAS 17/i (1955), pp. 50–73, reprinted in ibid, *The Turks, Iran and the Caucasus in the Middle Ages*, London: Variorum, 1978.

versions with a commentary on their differences. In the first passage, the Arabic conveys the meaning of the Persian without embellishment and is generally quite close to the Persian text. Some of the differences are clearly due to problems in the Persian manuscript tradition, for the Arabic text contains a few details lost in the Persian version. In the second passage, the Arabic translation is considerably shorter than the Persian text. It is unknown whether this because the Arabic translator decided to abridge the text, or, more likely, that some of the Persian text is interpolated. However, it seems that where manuscript tradition allows us to make a fair comparison between the texts, as in the first instance, it supports the contention that Add 836 represents an unembellished translation of the Persian, following reasonably closely the text of the lost manuscript from which it was translated.

None of the manuscripts of the Arabic translation of the *Tārīkhnāma* explicitly mention the Persian version or Balʿamī, as all lack the initial folios of the work. This proximity of the Arabic and Persian texts confirms that Add 836 was indeed a translation from Persian into Arabic, not an abridgement of Ṭabarī made directly from the original. However, at several points the manuscript contains the phrase *qāla 'l-mutarjim*, 'the translator said'. It is clear that these are references to Balʿamī, not to the translator of the text into Arabic, for they occur in passages where the Persian manuscripts also contain interventions by Balʿamī.[96]

The question of the accuracy of the ninth/fifteenth century copy is rather more difficult to prove conclusively given the lack of the original. There are errors in the transcription of certain Persian names, so Parvīz usually becomes Barwīn, and problems typical of manuscripts such as the repetition of a line owing to failure of the scribe's concentration also occur. It is a rare manuscript that is wholly free of such faults, and they are relatively minor matters compared with the grand scale of interpolation in the Persian manuscripts. It is interesting to note that a concerted effort seems to have been made to use the oldest manuscripts available in copying during the Tīmūrid and Ṣafavid periods. The Iranian scholar Bahār cites the *Shāhnāma* of Baysunqur and some Saʿdī manuscripts as examples of this tendency.[97] It was during this period that Bāyazīd b. Ṣadr al-Dīn made his copy of the Arabic Balʿamī, so it is possible that the cultural environment of his time encouraged him to seek out an antique manuscript to copy.

96 See for instance Add 836, f. 47b, where the phrase introduces an account of Alexander the Great's career based on the Qur'ān but absent from Ṭabarī.

97 M.T.Bahār, 'Tarjama-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī' in M.Qāsimzāda (ed.), *Yādnāma-i Ṭabarī*, Tehran: Markaz-i Taḥqīqāt-i 'Ālī-yi Kishvar, 1369, p. 539. However, this attention to textual reliability was not an innovation introduced in this period. We may see from the example of the eighth/fourteenth century author Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī's *Ẓafarnāma*, in which he also presented an edition of Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*, that the former author went to great lengths to produce an accurate version of the great epic, collating manuscripts for six years. As he put it, 'I took in hand many copies of the *Shāhnāma* to know pearl from shell [i.e. correct from corrupt text]. I selected one of them, of which the words were pleasant and fluent.' See N.Rastegar, 'Ḥamdu'llāh Mustaufīs historisches Epos *Ẓafarnāme*', *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 79(1989), p. 187.

Surprisingly (and encouragingly from the point of view of the accuracy and antiquity of the translation) the Arabic text apart from the colophon is wholly free of Shīʿite influences, in contrast to some of the Persian manuscripts, most notably RAS, Persian 22. Rather, episodes in Add 836 which one might expect to be doctored for sectarian reasons, such as the account of the Farewell Pilgrimage or the reign of ʿUthmān, remain conventionally Sunnī in tone and content. The reason for these Kūfan Shīʿites' interest in the translation was probably because it provided an abridged, accessible version of Ṭabarī's famous work.

One passage does provide a significant exception to this rule, which is Add 836's treatment of the killing of Ḥusayn, an event of tremendous importance for the Shīʿa. Add 836's version of events is more sympathetic to the Shīʿite point of view than most other Persian manuscripts of the *Tārīkhanāma*, as is discussed at length in Chapter 4.[98] However, while the details of this passage in Add 836 differ from those in most later manuscripts, they in fact usually agree with those in our oldest dated extant version of the text, the late sixth/twelfth century Mashhad manuscript.[99] The latter was produced in the strongly Sunnī atmosphere of Erzincan in Anatolia for the local ruler, and so it seems that this passage was not necessarily interpreted as implying a political allegiance to Shīʿism. The fact that these two older manuscripts—which are clearly not closely related, as they do differ elsewhere—agree against the testimony of later manuscripts suggests that, at least in places, they provide a more conservative text that was subsequently altered in most extant manuscripts. Unfortunately, the Mashhad manuscript is too fragmentary to be of much use in a general survey of the *Tārīkhnāma* such as this, although it must clearly be accorded greater significance in future studies. Nonetheless, it does confirm the importance of Add 836 and the other manuscripts of the Arabic translation as preserving a text of great antiquity.

Thus while it is not possible to assess the Arabic translation's accuracy conclusively, it does seem to offer an older text than the Persian manuscripts generally do. Moreover, it presents a coherent, consistent narrative in simple language, just what Balʿamī set out to do, yet which the Persian manuscripts fail to represent. So while the text of Add 836 may not represent an exact word-for-word translation of every line of Balʿamī, it presents a more convincing and reliable text than the Persian manuscripts do with their frequently confused and interpolated accounts. For this reason we shall use Add 836 as our main textual witness in examining the *Tārīkhnāma*, although the evidence of a selection of older Persian manuscript witnesses will also be cited to allow for comparison between the various versions of the text.

98 However, virtually all manuscripts (except Bodleian, Laud Or 323, which omits the episode entirely) show some sympathy for Ḥusayn, and this need not be equated with Shīʿite tendencies. This is confirmed by Add 836's treatment of other episodes key to the Shīʿite view of the past, such as the *saqīfa* meeting and the *shūrā* after ʿUmar's death, where the text remains conventionally Sunnī in tone.

99 See Chapter 4.

# 3
# Balʿamī's reshaping of Ṭabarī's *History*

Despite the textual differences between the various Persian manuscripts, certain features stand out as characteristic of the *Tārīkhnāma*. The most striking of these is the excision of the *isnāds* and variant *akhbār* of the original and the consolidation of Ṭabarī's dense and repetitive text into a smooth narrative. In addition, Balʿamī often implicitly or explicitly contradicts Ṭabarī, and in some places clearly draws on different sources, some of which are cited in Arabic without a Persian translation. Furthermore, the relative emphasis given to certain topics varies immensely between the Arabic and Persian texts, and the *Tārīkhnāma* and Ṭabarī's Arabic original probably even concluded at totally different points. This chapter will study how Balʿamī adapted the *History*, demonstrating that Balʿamī's method of writing history differed substantially from Ṭabarī's. As well as doing away with the apparatus of *akhbār*, *isnāds* and strict annalistic chronology upon which the Arabic *History* was based, Balʿamī shows considerably more interest in tales of pre-Islamic prophets than does Ṭabarī, and bases much of his narrative on the Qurʾān, which is cited extensively in Arabic. Balʿamī's frequent use of Arabic and the Qurʾān and his emphasis on prophecy strongly suggest that his 'translation' was prompted more by religious than patriotic motives and was probably aimed at an educated audience that was at least passively acquainted with Arabic.

Balʿamī's alterations to the *History* may be divided into two main types: alterations of form, in other words the differences between Ṭabarī's and Balʿamī's narrative methods; and alterations of content, such as Balʿamī's contradictions of Ṭabarī and his use of other sources to supplement the *History*. Conclusions are drawn on the basis of the following manuscripts: Add 836; RAS, Persian 22; Süleymaniye, Fatih 4285 and Aya Sofya 3050. These manuscripts have been selected as they offer some of the earliest complete versions of the text, the Persian ones all dating to the early eighth/ fourteenth century, and Add 836 offering a text apparently as old as the fifth/eleventh century. Older manuscripts, such as Bodleian, Laud Or 323 or the Edirne and Mashhad manuscripts, have generally been excluded from consideration as they are incomplete. The aim is not to describe in a comprehensive manner the variants of the textual tradition—a task far beyond the scope of this book—but rather to give the reader some impression of its problems. However, many of the issues under consideration in this chapter apply to all the Persian manuscripts and the Arabic translation, and in some instances, such as the excision of *isnāds*, are specifically mentioned in the introduction to the *Tārīkhnāma*. Thus we may be confident that such alterations characterized the Sāmānid text.

## 1. Alterations of Form

### *The excision of* isnāds *and* akhbār

Ṭabarī's historiographical project has often been commended by modern scholars for his attitude towards his sources, seemingly quoting previous authors intact.[1] Rather than presenting the reader with a single authoritative account, Ṭabarī records different accounts (*akhbār*, sing. *khabar*) of the same event transmitted to him by his sources, some of which are repetitions varying only in minor details, others of which are entirely contradictory. Each *khabar* is provided with an *isnād*, a list of authorities who transmitted the report to the author, stretching back to the original source. Ostensibly, this allows the audience to judge to reliability of the report and its transmitters. Readers may select as their preferred version of an event any of a number of options presented by Ṭabarī, who appears merely to have collected and arranged the various alternative reports about it. Indeed, Ṭabarī absolves himself of responsibility for the contents of the *History*, claiming that he has merely recorded all the reports that have reached him. If the reader finds anything objectionable in them, then that is the fault of the transmitters, not of Ṭabarī.[2] The *isnād* is thus essential to Ṭabarī's project, for it is only through this list of authorities that he can disclaim responsibility for the contents of the reports and present himself as the unbiased compiler.

As Stefan Leder has argued, the function of *akhbār* is primarily literary. They create an impression of reality and objectivity in the narrative. The narrator is distanced from the *khabar* by the *isnād* and rarely intervenes in the account. Characters' motives and thoughts are often conveyed by direct speech rather than by comments from the narrator. Leder shows that the existence of irreconcilable accounts of the same event, sometimes transmitted on the authority of the same witnesses, indicate that the *akhbār* are fabricated, and are in fact a literary device that contributes to 'the illusion of reality'.[3]

The removal of the *isnāds* and variant *akhbār* is superficially the most obvious difference between the *Tārīkhnāma* and Ṭabarī's original. Indeed, Bal'amī specifically claims in his preface that one of his main purposes is to remove these repetitions. He does not at any point select information from just one report given by Ṭabarī, but his accounts contain a mixture of information taken from all Ṭabarī's *akhbār*.[4] While some

1 For example, see C.E.Bosworth, 'al-Ṭabarī' in *EI2*, X, p. 13.

2 Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa-'l-Mulūk*, M.de Goeje (ed.), Leiden: Brill, 1879, I, pp. 5–7, and see also the discussion in B.Shoshan, *Poetics of Islamic Historiography: deconstructing Ṭabarī's* History, Leiden: Brill, 2004, pp. 139–40.

3 S.Leder, 'The literary use of the *khabar:* a basic form of historical writing' in A.Cameron and L.Conrad (eds), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: papers of the first workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1992, pp. 277–316, esp. pp. 307–8.

4 See Chapter 4.

scholars suggest that Ṭabarī's reports were arranged to favour a particular viewpoint,[5] as far as Bal'amī was concerned, all were suitable for inclusion in his own reworking of the *History*, regardless of the strength of their *isnāds* or their positioning in Ṭabarī's narrative. The impression of objectivity and realism that modern scholars identify in Ṭabarī is abandoned seemingly without any qualms by Bal'amī. The reader is now entirely in the hands of the narrator, who has selected, edited and re-presented all the information contained in the *History*.

Yet while Bal'amī's method of writing history seems superficially to be entirely contrary to—Ṭabarī's and that of historiography based on *akhbār* in general—in fact they share more similarities than are initially apparent. As Boaz Shoshan has noted, Ṭabarī in fact sometimes explicitly admits to excluding unsuitable reports from his *History*.[6] For instance, with regard to the murder of the Caliph 'Uthmān, Ṭabarī tells the reader that he has suppressed certain things reported by the transmitter Wāqidī 'because I find them offensive'.[7] It is also clear that Ṭabarī did not treat his sources with quite the respect he claims. Since the discovery of an early manuscript of Sayf b. 'Umar's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* it has become clear that Ṭabarī does not simply copy his authorities' reports. In fact, he alters whole sequences of events, dividing up single accounts in the original into multiple ones in his version. Conversely, there is evidence that sometimes he collapses different authorities' account into one with a single *isnād*.[8] This has been attributed by Ghada Osman to a failure of memory as Ṭabarī had learned the account aurally. This cannot be ruled out, but given Ṭabarī's willingness to suppress certain accounts and rewrite others, it is reasonable to suspect it is sometimes a result of a deliberate policy. Wāqidī, who was one of Ṭabarī's sources, combined *isnāds* in the interests of concision, although he met with some criticism for this practice.[9] Thus when Bal'amī ignores some of Ṭabarī's information and welds several of his accounts into one, he is in fact imitating not just exactly what Ṭabarī himself had done with his sources, but probably what these sources had done themselves with the accounts they transmitted.

5 M.Hodgson, 'Two pre-modern Muslim historians: pitfalls and opportunities in presenting them to moderns' in J.Nef (ed.), *Towards World Community*, The Hague: W.Junk, 1968, pp. 53–68; ibid, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in World Civilization*, I: *The Classical Age of Islam*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974, pp. 352–357; R.S. Humphreys, 'Qur'anic myth and narrative structure in early Islamic historiography' in F.M. Clover and R.S.Humphreys (eds), *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, pp. 271–290.

6 Shoshan, *Poetics of Islamic Historiography*, pp. 142–3, 147–8, 208.

7 Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, I, p. 2965.

8 G.Osman, 'Oral vs. written transmission: the case of Ṭabarī and Ibn Sa'd', *Arabica* 48 (2001), pp. 66–80, esp. pp. 71–74, 79.

9 C.F.Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 97.

It seems possible that a mediaeval readership found Ṭabarī's pretensions to impartiality and objectivity rather less convincing than modern scholars have done. By the fourth/tenth century, the whole apparatus of *isnāds* and *khabars* in historical writing had become largely a literary device, one at least in part devised to give a realistic effect to historiography, as well as, in theory, asserting the reliability of the work. The very fact that Balʿamī could so easily remove this apparatus in the conservative environment of Transoxiana, the mainstay of traditionism, suggests that it was not seen even by the ulema as much more, at least when it came to historiography. Indeed, none of Balʿamī's contemporaries used *isnāds:* Maqdisī, ʿĀmirī and the translators of the *Tafsīr* and *al-Sawād al-Aʿẓam* all cite *ḥadīth* but without any chains of authorities.

### *Chronology and the annalistic treatment of history*

Ṭabarī's narrative of Islamic history is defined by its division according to the *hijrī* year. In this respect, there is a marked stylistic break with the preIslamic sections of the *History* in which of course the possibility of using such a rigid chronology did not exist as this system of dating had not yet been invented. Where the *hijrī* chronology is used, the narrative is dominated by it. If an event occurs over more than one year, it will be recorded under the relevant years, the various relevant *akhbār* being separated by perhaps tens of pages of material relating to other, unconnected events that occurred at these dates. Shoshan argues that this structure is adopted as part of Ṭabarī's (or his authorities') aspiration to 'mimic reality' by following the exact sequence of events in the real world.[10] In contrast, Balʿamī jettisons this annalistic treatment of events in favour of a smooth linear narrative to which chronology is entirely subordinate. In Ṭabarī, chapters are headed by a title such as 'Account of what happened in year x', while in Balʿamī, the year in which events occurred is much less important, and is often not mentioned at all. Chapter titles relate to the events recorded rather than the chronology. Daniel argues that Ṭabarī's and Balʿamī's conceptions not just of chronology but also of history itself as well as cosmology are fundamentally different.[11] He contends that Ṭabarī's view of chronology was extremely contentious in the fourth/tenth century as some of the *akhbār* he cited, in particular those from the transmitter Wahb b. Munabbih, indicated that the world was due to end soon. '[T]he shift from a cyclical and dynastic conception of pre-Islamic history to a linear model of Islamic history, with its year by year approach, seemed to mark a countdown to the imminent end of the world, a notion

10 Shoshan, *Poetics of Islamic Historiography*, p. 61. As Shoshan discusses at length (ibid, pp. 61–84), there are of course some exceptions to this, when the narrative moves backwards or forwards outside of the exact chronological order to create a certain literary effect. Nonetheless, it is broadly true that Ṭabarī's narrative is subordinate to chronology.

11 E.Daniel, 'Balʿamī's account of early Islamic history', in F.Daftary and J.Meri (eds) *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: essays in honour of Wilferd Madelung*, London: IB Tauris, 2003, p. 175.

which Balʿamī, and perhaps others at the Sāmānid court, felt compelled to refute repeatedly, at length and in detail.'[12] Daniel suggests that the Ismāʿīlī implications of this, in particular the possibility that a new prophet was due to appear at the end of time, were particularly disturbing for Balʿamī and may have been one of the reasons why Balʿamī insists that the duration of the world cannot be known by anyone.[13]

However, a close examination of Ṭabarī's and Balʿamī's views of chronology and the duration of the world does not reveal great differences in approach. Ṭabarī piles up account after account which show the numerous differing views on the subject, concluding that God alone knows,[14] while Balʿamī cites various authorities—among them Ibn ʿAbbās and Wahb b. Munabbih—to make exactly the same point, that the duration of the world is unknowable. The same theme is accorded great importance by Maqdīsī in the *Kitāb al-Bad' wa-'l-Ta'rīkh*, in which the author insists that the only accurate eschatological information is that recorded by the Qurʾān and tradition, and cannot be acquired through the intellect.[15] Tradition, of course, rds varied and contradictory reports on the matter, so the upshot is the same as in Balʿamī and Ṭabarī: the duration of the world cannot be known.

Similar concerns are found in many other mediaeval Islamic works. The famous theologian Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) devotes the first two chapters of his *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* to condemning various views on the duration of the world, most of which he attributes to Greek philosophers.[16] The objection to alternative views about the duration of the world is, as Maqdisī and Ghazālī indicate, that they are based on intellectual speculation, which is an unsound basis for understanding these matters. This tradition-based approach to eschatology is also reflected in the work of the Transoxianan philosopher ʿĀmirī, who, it will be recalled, wished to make philosophy acceptable to the religiously conservative. Rather than attempting to defend the views of the Greek philosophers, he briefly mentions a couple of different *ḥadīths* on the duration of the world, and concludes, citing the Qurʾān (33.63), that the day of judgement might be near.[17] If the issue of the imminence of the day of judgement really had been a taboo in late fourth/tenth-century

12 Ibid, p. 182.

13 Ibid, p. 180.

14 Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, I, p. 15. Admittedly, Ṭabarī does express a preference for a report that suggests that there would be 500 years between the lifetime of the Prophet and the end of the world, but by the time the *Tārīkhnāma* was commissioned this would still mean that 150 years were left until the day of judgement, which is not particularly imminent compared to most apocalyptic claims. For instance, when Abū ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAmr wrongly predicted the date of the day of judgement, he said that the *umma* had been given a delay of 130 years enough to ensure he was not wrong twice. See S.Bashear, 'Muslim apocalypses and the hour: a case study in traditional interpretation', *Israel Oriental Studies* 13(1993), pp. 88–9, and pp. 95–6 for a discussion of this passage in Ṭabarī.

15 M.Tahmi, *L'Encyclopédisme musulman à l'âge classique:* Le Livre de la création et de l'histoire *de Maqdisî*, Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1998, pp. 103–5, 199–205.

Bukhārā, ʿĀmirī would scarcely have risked outraging the very audience to whom he wished to appeal by mentioning it in such a casual way. Rather, ʿĀmirī, like Maqdisī and Balʿamī, acknowledges the rectitude of the traditionalist view that the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* are the only legitimate sources upon which to base discussion of the matter.

Even if, contrary to the evidence presented in Chapter 1, Ismāʿīlism had remained a genuine threat in the mashriq during the reign of Manṣūr b. Nūḥ, it is quite incredible that he would have commissioned a translation of Ṭabarī if there was the slightest suspicion it could be interpreted in an Ismāʿīlī manner. As stressed in my discussion in Chapter 1, this was an epoch of near hysteria regarding Ismāʿīlism, and the Sāmānid state would not have wished to be associated with anything even remotely connected with it. Moreover, one would expect to find some reference in contemporary sources to the existence of such an interpretation of Ṭabarī's famous *History* but none appears to exist.

There is little basic difference between Ṭabarī's and Balʿamī's view of chronology and cosmology. Therefore, we do not need to look for political or theological reasons to explain why Balʿamī dropped the annalistic structure of the *History*. Rather, it is a literary phenomenon introduced for much the same reasons and to a similar effect as the excision of the *isnāds* and *akhbār*. It creates a much more easily readable text, for no longer does the record of other events obtrude into the account due to the demands of chronology. As with the removal of the *isnāds*, this is necessarily at the expense of some of the realistic effect Shoshan detects in the original. Nor can readers of the *Tārīkhnāma* rest under the illusion that they are reading a dispassionate record of information brought together by the editor from various sources and arranged rigidly but logically by year as the audience of Ṭabarī's original might. The reader of the *Tārīkhnāma* is entirely in the hands of the omniscient narrator, Balʿamī himself. However, as I have argued above, it is probably that mediaeval audiences found this less concerning than modern ones would, for they were always reliant on omniscient narrators, be they Ṭabarī, Sayf or Wāqidī.

### *Balʿamī's use of Qurʾānic and Arabic quotations*

One of the most curious features of the *Tārīkhnāma* is the presence of numerous quotations in Arabic, many of which seem to have been left untranslated. Often these quotations are from the Qurʾān, and the manuscript tradition is inconclusive on whether Balʿamī provided translations of these passages—in some manuscripts they are followed by a Persian version, in some they are left as they are in Arabic.[18] Non-Qurʾānic passages in Arabic are rarely translated.

16 Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, S.Dunyā (ed.), Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1392/1972, pp. 88–133.

17 E.Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and its Fate: al-ʿĀmirī's* Kitāb al-Amad ʿalā l-Abad, New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1988, p. 64.

18 For example in Fatih 4285, a Persian translation is not supplied, whereas one is in Aya Sofya 3050.

## I. *Qur'ānic quotations*

The majority of Arabic quotations in the *Tārīkhnāma* are Qur'ānic, and curiously, Bal'amī uses these Qur'ānic references more often than Ṭabarī himself. This is clear from the example of Bal'amī's account of the fighting at the Battle of Badr, in which much of the *Tārīkhnāma's* narrative is structured around verses from the *Sūrat al-Anfāl,* a *sūra* traditionally interpreted as being devoted in part to Badr. Ṭabarī cites *al-Anfāl* only twice in the entirety of his account, including all variants,[19] while Bal'amī cites verses from it at least seven times in an account which is distinctly shorter.[20] This use of the Qur'ān allows Bal'amī to expand on Ṭabarī's account by enlarging on events to which reference is made in *al-Anfāl* but which are ignored or merely alluded to in the Arabic *History*.

Bal'amī first cites *al-Anfāl* when he recounts Muḥammad's dream on the night before the battle, a dream of the Qurashī army drowning, which was 'the first dream of the defeat of Quraysh. Then God Exalted revealed, "*When God showed thee them in a dream as few; and had he shown them as many, you would have lost heart and disputed about the matter; but God saved; He knows the thoughts in the breasts'"* (Q. 8. 44).[21] The action then moves to the next day, when the Meccans advance to the edge of Badr and see Muḥammad is nearer the water at Badr than they. 'God Exalted said, "*When you were on the nearer bank and they were on the farther bank* (Q. 8. 42) that is, you were nearer to the water of Badr and they were further…. "'[22] As the Qurashīs advance one by one they ridicule Muḥammad's followers, but again Muḥammad is told by God,'*When God showed you them in your eyes as few,*[23] *when you encountered, and made you few in their eyes, that God might settle a matter that was done; and unto God all matters are returned'* (Q. 8. 44).[24]

After this section, which is structured around these scriptural references, there is no reference to the Qur'ān while the next events are covered. These are the start of the fighting with Ḥamza's killing of a Makhzūmī tribesman trying to obtain water, thereby polluting the well. Ḥakīm b. Ḥizām then attempts to persuade the other Qurashīs to

19 Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, I, pp. 1288 ('Urwa's letter) and 1320 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb on the angelic assistance (discussed below)).

20 Add 836, ff. 87a-90b; RAS 22 in *Tārīkhnāma-i Ṭabarī gardānīda-i mansūb bi-Bal'amī*, M.Rawshan (ed.), Tehran: Soroush, 1378/1999, III, pp. 107–146; Fatih 4285, ff. 175b– 185a; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 186b-189b. Aya Sofya 3050 presents us with severe problems at this juncture, because it contains a much shortened account of Badr lacking the majority of the Qur'ānic quotations from *al-Anfāl*, although including some not present in the other manuscripts.

21 Add 836, f. 87b; *Tārīkhnāma*, III, p. 121; Fatih 4285, f. 178b. The same events are recorded without the Qur'ānic quotations in Aya Sofya 3050.

22 Add 836, f. 87b; *Tārīkhnāma*, III, p. 121; Fatih 4285, f. 178b.

23 Add 836: three hundred. This is a copying error. Leiden University Library, Or 3103, f. 180b, contains the correct version.

24 Add 836, f. 88a; *Tārīkhnāma*, III, p. 122; Fatih 4285, f. 179b.

give up the fight and retreat.[25] Balʿamī follows the debate in the Meccan camp as Abū Jahl furiously refuses to give up. The absence of Qur'ānic quotations is probably due to the concentration of this section on the unbelieving Quraysh, rendering their introduction inappropriate.[26]

The narrative returns to the Muslims, who now lack water due to the pollution of the well. God comes to their aid: *'[He sent] down on you water from heaven, to purify you thereby, and to put away from you the defilement of Satan, and to strengthen your hearts, and to confirm your feet'* (Q. 8. 11). At dawn, God reveals, *'If victory you are seeking, victory has already come upon you'* (Q. 8. 19).[27] While skirmishes between Quraysh and the Muslims commence, Muḥammad takes Abū Bakr to his improvised quarters and tells him that the angels, headed by Gabriel, have come to help. During the fighting, God tells the angels to stand in line with the Muslims while He inspires them with hatred of the unbelievers, and as He commands the wind to blow dust into the infidels' faces, the angels and the believers attack. When the believers stretch their swords against the enemy, the angels often get there first and cut off the Qurashī soldiers' heads. Due to the angelic intervention the Muslims are victorious.[28]

This story of the angelic intervention appears in such detail only in Balʿamī. It is alluded to by Ṭabarī, who records it as a dream:

> The Messenger of God slept a light sleep in the shelter for a while; then he awoke and said, 'Abū Bakr, God's aid has come to you. Here is Gabriel, taking hold of the reins of his horse and leading it, and there is dust on its front teeth.'[29]

At the end of Ṭabarī's account of the fighting, there are three more brief allusions to angelic intervention in accounts according to various authorities, and one direct mention in a *khabar* the *isnād* of which is traced through Ibn Isḥāq to Ibn ʿAbbās:

> The sign of the angels on the day of Badr was white turbans which trailed down their backs, and on the day of Ḥunayn it was red turbans. The angels did not fight on any day except the day of Badr; on the other days they were assistants and helpers, but they struck no blows.[30]

25 Add 836, f. 88a; *Tārīkhnāma*, III, p. 123; Fatih 4285, f. 179b.
26 Aya Sofya 3050 (f. 187b) recounts the Makhzūmī's killing, but makes no mention of the debates among the Qurashī tribesmen or of Ḥakīm b. Ḥizām.
27 Add 836, f. 88a; *Tārīkhnāma*, III, p. 124; Fatih 4285, f. 179b.
28 Aya Sofya 3050 has the same story (f. 188a) but places it after the quotation of Q. 8.9 which comes later in the narrative in other manuscripts.
29 Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, VII: *The Foundation of the Community: Muhammad at al-Madina AD 622–626/Hijrah-4AH* (tr. W.Montgomery Watt), Albany, State University of New York Press, 1987, p. 55; ibid, *Taʾrīkh*, I, p. 1321.
30 Ṭabarī, *History*, VII, p. 61; ibid, *Taʾrīkh*, I, pp. 1328–9.

Ibn Hishām and Wāqidī also contain brief references to this event,[31] but no author appears to give it the prominence that Bal'amī does. In the latter, the angelic intervention is the decisive factor in assuring the Muslim victory, while in the other authors it appears more as a footnote than an essential part of the narrative. The origin of the story is in the *sūras Āl 'Imrān* and *al-Anfāl: 'When you were calling upon your Lord for succour, and He answered you, "I shall reinforce you with a thousand angels riding behind you"'* (Q. 8. 9). The remainder of Bal'amī's narrative is relatively close to Ṭabarī's account, which relies largely on the traditionist Ibn Hishām, and the closest parallel for the story of the angelic intervention at Badr is not in Ṭabarī but in the Sāmānid *Tarjuma-i Tafsīr-i Ṭabarī*. The detail of the narrative is not identical, but it does form the climax of the Persian *Tafsīr's* account of Badr, which cites a long passage from *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* at its conclusion:

> The infidel…started fighting fiercely. At the same time God sent the Prophet help from the heavens in the form of angels. The Prophet took one handful of dust and threw it in the infidels' faces saying, 'Their faces are deformed.' The infidels became blind and all the Meccan notables who were there were killed…. God Exalted gave the Prophet victory over them by sending five thousand angels to help. This is what God said, *God most surely helped you at Badr, when you were utterly abject. So fear God and haply you will be thankful. When thou saidst to the believers, 'Is it not enough for you that your Lord should reinforce you with three thousand angels sent down upon you? Yea; if you are patient and godfearing, and the foe come against you instantly, your Lord will reinforce you with five thousand swooping angels'* (Q. 3. 123–125).[32]

A second mention is included in the rather brief commentary on *al-Anfāl,* where the story, closing with Q. 8. 9, again forms the conclusion of the text:

> Leaving the shelter the Prophet saw Gabriel coming with a thousand angels with spears. He told the army, 'Hasten and attack.' The Muslim army attacked and the angels went before the men and killed. The sign of those whom the angels killed is that no blood was shed, but from those whom men killed blood flowed like a river.[33]

31 Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya,* Ṭ. 'Abd al-Ra'ūf (ed.), Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyya, 1973, II, pp. 196, 199–200; Wāqidī, *The* Kitāb al-Maghāzī *of al-Wāqidī,* M.Jones (ed.), London: Oxford University Press, 1966, I, pp. 107 and 113.

32 *Tarjuma-i Tafsīr-i Ṭabarī,* Ḥ Yaghmā'ī (ed.), Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 2536, I, p. 253.

33 Ibid, III, p. 596. The translators add the comment, This story [of Badr] has been related in full under *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān,* apart from this, which is related here.'

There are evident discrepancies between the versions in the Persian *Tafsīr* and *Tārīkhnāma:* the Tafsīr, for instance, holds Muḥammad responsible for throwing dust in the infidels' faces, while Balʿamī attributes it to divine intervention. However, it is only the two Sāmānid texts that give such prominence to the tale of angelic intervention, suggesting that both texts share a common interpretation of the past which is distinct from that of their source.

Other examples of such similarities between the *Tārīkhnāma* and the *Tafsīr* occur relatively frequently. In their accounts of the death of Pharaoh by drowning under the waters of the Red Sea, both quote Q. 10.90, 10.91 and 40.84.[34] These Qur'ānic quotes, as in the case of the story of the fighting at Badr, are actually part of the narrative itself in both cases and not a commentary on it. Yet while the citation of the Qur'ān so often in a *Tafsīr* is unsurprising, it is more remarkable in the *Tārīkhnāma*. Balʿamī's extensive use of the Qur'ān suggests that, even more than Ṭabarī, he saw his task as to write sacred history, and the numerous Qur'ānic citations reinforce the significance of God's constant role in the affairs of the *umma*.

## *II. Non-Qur'ānic quotations*

Apart from Qur'ānic verses, the *Tārīkhnāma* contains many other passages in Arabic, some of which appear to be taken from Ṭabarī's text, some from elsewhere. The latter will be discussed in due course. Most of these quotations are lines of poetry, but some prose passages exist as well. One of the most significant occurs in the *Tārīkhnāma's* account of two false prophets who arose in Arabia after the Prophet's death, Musaylima and Sajāḥ, where it comprises the dialogue between the two,[35] and in Musaylima's prophecies and rulings. In both cases, the quotations are in *sajʿ*, the rhyming prose that was favoured by pre-Islamic *kuhhān* (soothsayers) and which doubtless influenced the style of the Qur'ān. The Arabic, which is often somewhat obscure, has been preserved accurately in both Persian manuscripts and Add 836.

The literary effect of these quotations relies on them being in Arabic *sajʿ*. Musaylima's references to the revelation of *sūras* to him, and the similarity yet inferiority of his *sajʿ* to that of the Qur'ān, highlight the falsehood of his prophetic pretensions. Had they been translated into Persian, they would have lost much of this effect. Nonetheless, it curious that there do not appear to be many manuscripts in which they are provided with a Persian translation following the Arabic original, unlike some of the Qur'ānic passages.

Significantly, these quotations presume a good understanding of Arabic on the part of the audience. It is possible that the Qur'ān was sufficiently well known that to quote it in

34 *Tarjuma-i Tafsīr-i Ṭabarī*, II, pp. 530–532; Add 836, f. 28b; *Tārīkhnāma*, I, p. 312.

35 Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, I, pp. 1915–18; Add 836, f. 129b; *Tārīkhnāma*, III, p. 379ff; Fatih 4285, ff. 230b–232a; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 236a–237b.

a Persian work would not necessarily have presumed an audience's sound knowledge of Arabic, but rather merely a recollection of the meaning of memorized material. It is, however, highly unlikely that the audience could have had any prior familiarity with the words of Musaylima and Sajāḥ, unless indeed they had read Ṭabarī, our main source for this story. This indicates that Balʿamī's intended audience must have been educated, and that his preface—itself in Arabic—is somewhat disingenuous when it states that that Manṣūr b. Nūḥ ordered the *History* to be translated so that ordinary people could understand it. This impression is reinforced when one examines the *Tarjuma-i Tafsīr*, itself also provided with an Arabic preface. This work provides translations of all the Qurʾānic *sūras*, but in the parts of the *Tafsīr* translation which are devoted to exegesis, no translation of Qurʾānic verses is given, even if the verses quoted are from a totally different *sūra*. Thus it appears that both translations were aimed at an audience that was at least to some extent competent in Arabic.

### *Accentuating disagreement: Balʿamī as narrator*

One of the most perplexing features of the Persian *Tārīkhnāma* is Balʿamī's tendency to disagree explicitly with Ṭabarī, dismissing the version of events he has given. Firstly, it is unclear why Balʿamī should want to undermine Ṭabarī's reputation for being authoritative, which would, one might imagine, be detrimental to whatever purpose Balʿamī was seeking to achieve by attaching Ṭabarī's name to his work. Secondly, these interventions by Balʿamī often concern matters that appear to be unimportant, and sometimes downright trivial. Thirdly, sometimes the Persian *Tārīkhnāma* includes statements about the Arabic original that are demonstrably untrue, for instance stating that a passage is not present in Ṭabarī which does actually exist there.[36] It is true that the Arabic translation preserved in Add 836 includes fewer of these references to deficiencies in Ṭabarī's text than the Persian manuscripts, although this might be due to a tendency to abridge the Persian slightly. Nonetheless, they do exist, and I examine two instances below where the Arabic and Persian manuscripts of the *Tārīkhnāma* concur in disagreeing with Ṭabarī. This suggests that the comments may be traced back to Balʿamī himself.

Our first example occurs during the well-known story of how Moses received the Tablets with the Commandments from God.[37] Balʿamī records Moses' ascent of Mt Sinai, accompanied by 70 good men. Balʿamī then interjects:

36 Daniel, Balʿamī's account of early Islamic history', pp. 166, 170.
37 Add 836, f. 29a–b; *Tārīkhnāma*, I, p. 316ff.

> Ṭabarī stated that Moses went alone, not with seventy [men]. When he had finished praying, he found many of his people had worshipped the calf, so he killed many of them. Then God forgave them, and he went with those seventy to pray to God, and to ask for the Torah for the Tribe of Israel. This is not correct.[38]

Balʿamī explains that the 70 went with Moses and said they would not believe him unless they could actually see God, for which they are rewarded with a thunderbolt. He argues that Moses said, *'My Lord, hadst Thou willed*

38 Text of Add 836; RAS, Persian 22 and Aya Sofya 3050 add, 'And this does not accord with the account in the Qur'ān, and anything that disagrees with the Qur'ān is wrong. In the Qur'ān, it is stated that…'. The source for this is given as the *Tafsīr*. *Tārīkhnāma*, I, p. 319; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 71a; Fatih 4285, f. 64b, where the text differs slightly, does not attribute this view to Ṭabarī but to 'a group of people'.

*Thou wouldst have destroyed them before, and me. Wilt Thou destroy us for what the foolish ones of us have done?'* (Q. 7.155), and therefore must have been after the incident with the calf, as God then accepted the people's repentance. Ṭabarī's account is based on the respected Companion of the Prophet Ibn ʿAbbās, cited by Balʿamī on occasion,[39] and is transmitted by Ibn Isḥāq whom Balʿamī quotes elsewhere. It is hard to imagine that this minor difference with Ṭabarī can have been one of the burning issues that made Manṣūr b. Nūḥ require a new adaptation of the History. Indeed, the innocuous nature of the passage is confirmed by the Persian translation of Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr*, which records the same account as Balʿamī does, but draws no attention to it and does not even mention any difference with Ṭabarī.[40]

A second example occurs in one of the most prominent places in the *Tārīkhnāma*. Both Balʿamī and Ṭabarī separate their discussions of pre-Islamic and Islamic history by a discussion of the duration between creation and Muḥammad's birth, known as the *Rūzgār-i ʿĀlam* in Persian.[41] However, while the birth of the Prophet is dealt with in the pre-Islamic section, Muḥammad's genealogy introduces the Islamic portions of both Ṭabarī's and Balʿamī's histories, followed by accounts of his early life down to the *hijra*. The genealogy traces Muḥammad's ancestry back to Ishmael, Abraham and ultimately Adam. Balʿamī chooses this prominent point to stress again his disagreement

39 Add 836, f. 2a; *Tārīkhnāma*, p. 6; Fatih 4285, n/a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 7a.

40 *Tarjuma-i Tafsīr-i Ṭabarī*, I, p. 67.

41 In some Persian manuscripts, this account is moved to the start of the work where it immediately follows the doxology.

with Ṭabarī. The very first sentence of the Islamic portion of the text states in the Arabic translation of Balʿamī, 'The translator said that Ṭabarī mentioned different accounts of [Muḥammad's] lineage from Maʿadd b. ʿAdnān back to Ishmael b. Abraham. In some of them he recorded that there were thirteen ancestors, in some nineteen. We have no need of [discussing] this difference.'[42] Similar comments are found in many of the Persian manuscripts.[43] In fact, Ṭabarī gives several different versions from various authorities, but in none of them is the number of ancestors recorded as 13 or 19.[44] Furthermore, the discussion of these variants is accorded much less prominence in Ṭabarī's text, where it is relegated to the end of the discussion of the Prophet's ancestry.

Elton Daniel has given further examples of these interventions by Balʿamī.[45] He attributes some of them to the possibility that the Arabic text of Ṭabarī available in the fourth/tenth century differs from today's, and others to a need to respond to the political circumstances in which the Sāmānid state found itself. However, the evidence cited in the previous chapter suggests that Ṭabarī's text has been comparatively well preserved, while the discussion above demonstrates the insignificant nature of some of the issues about which Balʿamī disagrees with Ṭabarī. Conversely, many of Balʿamī's alterations to Ṭabarī's work are not emphasized, no matter how important. Entire chapters, for example the story of the King Shaddād b. ʿImlīq,[46] are introduced without any comment to make the reader aware they are not to be found in Ṭabarī's original.

Thus Balʿamī's interventions do not reflect the importance of the issues at stake. Rather than being disagreements about historical facts, they must be seen as a literary device that in fact aims to bolster the authoritative nature of the Persian translation. Precisely by picking on insignificant issues about which to disagree with Ṭabarī, Balʿamī wished to give the impression of being better informed and more authoritative than the original whilst avoiding an open dispute with him on truly contentious matters. In this respect, Balʿamī's interventions may be compared with the detailed, realistic descriptions that decorate many of the *akhbār* of the Arabic *History*, as Shoshan has

42 Add 836, f. 71b.

43 The different accounts of the number of Muḥammad's ancestors seems to be responsible for some instability in the Persian manuscript tradition at this point, although disagreement with Ṭabarī is frequently expressed. RAS Persian 22 claims to take its account from a Kitāb *al-Ansāb* (*Tārīkhnāma*, III, pp. 2–3), but cites alternative *rivāyats* in which the number of ancestors between Maʿadd and Ishmael is given variously as five, six or ten. Despite the different numbers given, like Add 836, the manuscript concludes that 'we have no need of this difference'. The text of Fatih 4285 (f. 151b) is very close to RAS Persian 22 at this point, giving the number of ancestors as three, five or ten, and also citing the *Kitāb al-Ansāb*. Aya Sofya 3050, f. 172b, contains no mention of any disagreement over the issue. See Chapter 2 for another example of the instability of the Persian texts at this point.

44 Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, I, pp. 1113–23.

45 Daniel, 'Balʿamī's account of early Islamic history', pp. 172–7.

46 Add 836, ff. 10a–11a; *Tārīkhnāma*, I, pp. 120–3; Fatih 4285, n/a; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 27b–28b.

semonstrated:[47] the intention of these is to create an impression of historical reality, while the aim of Balʿamī's comments is to emphasize the accuracy of his own version of history and its superiority even to that of the renowned Ṭabarī.

Admittedly, as Elton Daniel remarks, Balʿamī doubtless detected a number of axes being ground by Ṭabarī, whose work is by no means the model of unbiased objectivity it purports to be.[48] By contradicting Ṭabarī, Balʿamī may have sought to distance himself from some of his prejudices, but more importantly he staked his own claim to be an independent historian. Ṭabarī's *History* famously preserves the disagreements of the author's sources. As Robinson comments, 'preserving disagreement—indeed even accentuating it—is an important feature of traditionist historiography… [W]hile Ṭabarī, the historian, preserves and presents disagreement after disagreement in his *History*, al-Ṭabarī, the exegete and jurist, almost always tells us exactly what to make of points of Qur'ānic interpretation and law.'[49] Balʿamī of course had removed all these disagreements, the variant accounts which make up Ṭabarī's *History*, and created a coherent, flowing but superficially bland narrative. It is by stressing his differences with Ṭabarī, often over seemingly irrelevant or trivial points, that Balʿamī alerts the reader to the fact that his work is more than a translation and that he himself must be considered a true historian, preserving and accentuating differences.

## 2. Alterations of content

### *Additional sources used in the* Tārīkhnāma

As well as incorporating some Arabic passages of the *History* into his Persian adaptation, Balʿamī also explicitly mentions at several points that he has taken information from other sources to supplement Ṭabarī. As ever, the problems with the manuscript tradition make it extremely difficult to identify which passages were added by Balʿamī and which by later redactors. Sources alluded to in some Persian manuscripts are often not mentioned at all in the Arabic retranslation of Balʿamī. This could mean that they are later interpolations, but it could also be another consequence of the Arabic *Tārīkhnāma's* occasional tendency to concision. Yet even when there are passages common to both the Persian versions of the *Tārīkhnāma* and its Arabic retranslation, it is not possible to reach any categorical conclusions as to whether these are interpolated, for we are entirely ignorant about the first century of the work's transmission. Indeed, even if the references to books and authors that are found in the *Tārīkhnāma* are the work of Balʿamī himself,

47 Shoshan, *Poetics of Islamic Historiography*, pp. 8–24.
48 Daniel, Balʿamī's account of early Islamic history', p. 181.
49 Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, p. 79.

that does not necessarily mean that these books were actually consulted by him. Pre-modern authors frequently cited famous works merely to impress their audiences; likewise Ṭabarī himself would be mentioned by numerous authors whose works bore no relation to his in order to make their scholarship seem more impressive. So when, for instance, the *Tārīkhnāma* contains a reference to the *Shāhnāma* of Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī,[50] it is difficult to judge the significance of this.

However, it seems likely that Balʿamī drew on additional sources. For instance, the story of Bahrām Chūbīn, from whom the Sāmānid dynasty claimed descent, is treated very differently in Ṭabarī and Balʿamī. According to some manuscripts, the *Akhbār-i ʿAjam* ('History of Iran'), an unidentified text, served as a source for this episode in the *Tārīkhnāma*.[51] In this section, I shall attempt to identify and discuss some of the most important Arabic sources, although for the reasons mentioned above this must remain somewhat hypothetical. Given that no New Persian sources older than Balʿamī survive (if they were ever written), it would be futile to attempt to identify them.

The most readily identifiable borrowings are the lines of Arabic poetry quoted by Balʿami, not all of which originate in Ṭabarī (at least as far as we can judge from the available text of the *History*). While Balʿamī quotes Arabic verse rarely compared to Ṭabarī, important episodes often have at least one such quotation. For instance, most texts of the *Tārīkhnāma* contain several poetic citations in the section concerning the death of Ḥusayn.[52] As in Ṭabarī's narrative, the poetry serves as 'a commentary or a retrospective reflection on the events that unfold'.[53] The sources of those verses which are absent from Ṭabarī's Arabic are various. Sometimes these quotations are transposed by Balʿamī from elsewhere in Ṭabarī's text,[54] but frequently they originate in a different context in other works. Discussing Khālid b. al-Walīd's extravagant marriage to Mujāʿa's daughter, Balʿamī says,

50 Add 836 and other manuscripts of the Arabic retranslation: text missing; *Tārīkhnāma,* I, p. 5; Fatih 5285, n/a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 2a mentions it just as the *Shāhnāma-i Buzurg* without attributing an author to it.

51 Add 836, n/a; *Tārīkhnāma,* II, p. 764; Fatih 4285, n/a; Aya Sofya 3050, n/a.

52 Five separate quotations in Add 836 (ff. 195b-197b); seven in RAS Persian 22 (*Tārīkhnāma,* IV, pp. 703–715); five in Fatih 4285, ff. 288a-291a; four in Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 303b-306a.

53 Shoshan, *Poetics of Islamic Historiography,* p. 82.

54 Thus for instance a line of verse declaimed by Yazīd on seeing Ḥusayn's head (Add 836, f. 197b) is adapted from a completely different context later in the *Taʾrīkh* (III, p. 566) where, however, it is nonetheless attributed to Yazīd. This line is not to be found in RAS, Persian 22, Fatih 4285, or Aya Sofya 3050.

A poet named Ziyād b. ʿUmayr al-Laythī, a friend of ʿUmar, composed [this poem] and sent it to ʿUmar for him to show to Abū Bakr:

Tell the Commander of the Faithful/
from a well-wisher who does not wish treachery,
The girl's value is one million in all/
while the chiefs of the army spend the night hungry.[55]

The lines are not to be found in the Arabic *History*, but are recorded by Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), according to whom they were composed on a completely different occasion. He says they were written by Ibn Abī Anas (Ibn Hammām), and sent to ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zubayr on the occasion of his brother Muṣʿab's marriage.[56] Balʿamī may have taken the lines from some earlier source such as Ibn Qutayba and deliberately changed the poet's name and the context; or he may have consulted an independent Arabic source that has not been traced yet. I cautiously favour the second option, as it is not obvious why Balʿamī would need to change the poet's name. Fortunately, the sources of other Arabic quotations may be more readily identified and these we shall now investigate.

## *Ibn Isḥāq's* Sīra

One of the most interesting passages for our investigation may be traced back to the work of Ibn Isḥāq, an early Arab historian (before 159/767). It is a line of poetry attributed in the *Tārīkhnāma* to the uncle of Muḥammad, Abū Ṭālib, defending his nephew from his Meccan enemies, and it is cited thus:

55 Add 836, f. 132b; A third verse is added in *Tārīkhnāma*, III, p. 401; Fatih 4285, f. 245b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 242a.
56 Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shiʿr wa-ʾl-Shuʿarāʾ*, A.Shākir (ed.), Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1386/1966, II, p. 737.

*Fa-wallāhi lā waṣalū ilayka bi-jamʿihim/*
*ḥattā ughayyibu fī ʾl-turābi dafīnan*
*Fa-ʾmḍi li-ʾmrika mā ʿalayka ghaḍāḍatan/*
*fa-ʾbshir wa-qarr bi-dhālika ʿuyūnan*
*Fa-laqad daʿawta wa-qulta annaka nāṣiḥun/*
*wa-laqad daʿūka qabla dhālika amīnan*
*Law lā ʾl-malāmata aw ḥadhārī masabbatinl*
*la-wajadtanī samḥan*[57] *li-dhālika makīnan*[58]

> ‘By God, they shall not entirely come to you/until I am buried in earth, So go about your business without stain/announce the news and bring joy You proclaimed and said you are an adviser/they called you “trustworthy” [previously. Were it not for blame and insults/you would find me truly committed.’

The version preserved in one of the several extant recensions of Ibn runs as follows:

*Wallāhi lan yaṣilū ilayhi bi-jamʿihim/*
*ḥattā uwassidu fī ʾl-turābi dafīnan*
*Imḍi li-ʾmrika mā ʿalayka ghaḍāḍatan/*
*wa-ʾbshir wa-qarr bi-dhālika minka ʿuyūnan*
*Daʿawtanī wa-ʿallamta annaka nāṣiḥun/*
*fa-laqad ṣadaqta wa-kunta qidman amīnan*
*Wa-ʿaraḍta dīnan qad ʿarafta annahul*
*khayr adyāni ʾl-barriyyati dīnan*
*Law lā ʾl-malāmata aw ḥadhārī subbatinl*
*la-wajadtanī samḥan li-dhālika mubīnan*[59]

57 MS: saḥḥan.
58 Add 836, f. 76b; RAS Persian 22, n/a; Fatih 4285, f. 162a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 180a.
59 Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq al-musammāh bi-Kitāb al-Mubtadaʾ wa-ʾl-Maghāzī*, M. Ḥamīdallāh (ed.), Rabāṭ: Maʿhad al-Dirāsāt wa-ʾl-Abḥāth li-ʾl-Taʿrīb, 1396/1976, p. 136. The penultimate line in this quotation, absent in Balʿamī, means, ‘You showed a religion which you knew was the best religion of mankind.’

The differences between the texts are small, especially given that Ibn Isḥāq's text was already 200 years old by the time Balʿamī was writing. It seems likely that Ibn Isḥāq was the one of the sources used by Balʿamī.

s extent of the *Tārīkhnāma's* reliance on Ibn Isḥāq is difficult to assess. Daniel has suggested that the preference for accounts from a work called *al-Maghāzī* expressed occasionally in the *Tārīkhnāma* is a reference to Wāqidī's work of the same name.[60] However, Ibn Isḥāq also wrote a work named *al-Maghāzī,* although it has not come down to us, and it is possible that this was a source for the *Tārīkhnāma*.[61] Yet it is extremely difficult to trace such influence directly as the text of Ibn Isḥāq is if anything in an even worse state than that of Balʿamī.Our main source for Ibn Isḥāq's text is a later redaction of the parts dealing with the biography of the prophet, the *Sīra*, made by Ibn Hishām (d. 208/834). At first glance it appears to preserve the original quite well, with some editorial comments added by the redactor and the omission of some of the poetry. This is, however, an entirely false impression. The publication by Ḥamīdallāh in 1976 of a manuscript preserved in the Qarawiyyīn Library in Fez obliged scholars to revise their view of Ibn Hishām's edition, for it presented the *Sīra* in a hitherto unknown recension, that of Yūnus b. Bukayr. Ibn Bukayr both omits much of the information present in Ibn Hishām's edition and includes a good deal of additional material, and in some ways seems to offer an older text. The verses cited above are to be found only in Ibn Bukayr, not in Ibn Hishām.

The matter is complicated further by the fact that Ibn Bukayr also wrote a work called *Ziyādāt al-Maghāzī* the text of which is present in the same manuscript. Muranyi estimates that from the second part of Ibn Bukayr's text to the end there are 18 passages which have authorities other than Ibn Isḥāq.[62] Even passages which are common to both Ibn Hishām and Ibn Bukayr are not identical.[63] Moreover, there are fragments of Ibn Isḥāq preserved in various recensions in other works. Ṭabarī, for example, frequently cites the recension of Salama b. Faḍl al-Abrash. Sellheim has examined some of these, and has found five different accounts of Muḥammad's first revelation attributed to Ibn Isḥāq in various sources.[64] It is impossible to reconstruct Ibn Isḥāq's original, and it is equally hard to ascertain which recension Balʿamī was using: while the lines above come from Ibn Bukayr, there are also similarities to his

60 Daniel, 'Balʿamī's account of early Islamic history', pp. 166, 185–6; cf. *Tārīkhnāma,* III, pp. 53, 106

61 Daniel, 'Manuscripts and editions of Balʿamī's *Tarjamah-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*', *JRAS* 3rd series, 2(1990), p. 285, n. 12.

62 M.Muranyi, Ibn Isḥāq's *Kitab al-Maġāzī* in der *Riwāya* von Yūnus b. Bukair: Bemerkungen zur frühen Überlieferungsgeschichte', *JSAI* 14(1991), pp. 232–3.

63 Ibid, p. 234.

64 R.Sellheim, Muḥammads erstes Offenbarungserlebnis: zum Problem mündlicher und schriftlicher Überlieferung in 1./7. und 2./8. Jahrhundert', *JSAI* 10(1987), *passim*.

*al-Anfāl*, just as Balʿamīʾstext is, although the texts themselves do differ significantly.[65] treatment of Badr in another recension of Ibn Isḥāq,a fragment preserved in the Ẓāhiriyyalibrary in Damascus. The narrative in this manuscript is structured around quotations from

So while a recension of Ibn Isḥāqwas probably used in the composition of the *Tārīkhnāma*, the state of the text of the former precludes an investigation into the extent of this. Only the occasional evidence of poetry such as that cited above can indicate the origins of Balʿamīʾsmaterial, and even this is not conclusive as it is possible that Balʿamītook it from another, unidentified source that quoted them. Furthermore, as so often, the manuscript tradition of the *Tārīkhnāma* does not allow us to attribute this material to Balʿamīwith absolute certainty; although it is present in the conservative text of Add 836 and some Persian manuscripts, it is omitted in others. Whatever the precise influence of Ibn Isḥāqon the structure and content of the *Tārīkhnāma*, it is clear that Balʿamītreated Ṭabarīin much the same way as his own later editors and copyists would approach him, by discarding and dismissing much of the original and using other, unacknowledged sources to supplement it.

## *Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī's* Kitāb al-Futūḥ

It has long been recognized that the *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*('Book of Conquests') by Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī(third/ninth century?)[66] is the source of material in some versions of the *Tārīkhnāma*.[67] For example, some manuscripts of the *Tārīkhnāma* preserve a Persian version of the text of the agreement between Qutayba b. Muslim, the Arab conqueror of Central Asia, and the ruler of Samarqand on the surrender of the city to the Muslim in 93/712, which is recorded by the *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*.[68] Admittedly, the text is slightly abbreviated in the *Tārīkhnāma*, but it is easily recognizable as the same document translated into Persian.[69] Elsewhere, the *Tārīkhnāma* may preserve passages of the original Arabic text of the *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*( Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī used very little poetry in his book, so it cannot have been one of the sources of the verse in the *Tārīkhnāma*). An example of this is the will of the Caliph Abū

65 The text is reproduced in Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq al-musammāh bi-Kitāb al-Mubtadaʾ wa-ʾl-Maghāzī*,pp. 285–8, and cites Q. 8. 38, 57, 60–70, 73 and 75. *Al-Anfāl* is also cited extensively by al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, I, p. 98, pp. 131–8.

66 On his dates see Z.V.Togan, 'Ibn Aʿtham al-Kufi',*Islamic Culture* 44/iv (1970), pp. 249–252

67 A.N.Kurat, 'Kuteybe bin Müslim'in Hvârizm ve Semerkand'i Zabtı',*Ankara* Üniversitesi *Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Dergisi* 6/v (1948), pp. 385–430; ibid, 'Abū Muḥammad Aḥmad bin Aʿṣam al-Kūfī'nin *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*'u',*Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Dergisi* 7/ii (1949), pp. 255–277.

68 *Tārīkhnāma,* IV, p. 845.

69 See O.I.Smirnova, 'K istorii Samarkandskogo dogovora 712 g.', *Kratkie Soobshcheniia Instituta Vostokovedeniia* 38(1960), pp. 68–79.

Bakr, not recorded by Ṭabarī.[70] The versions in the *Tārīkhnāma* and the *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* are close: [71]

*I. Tārīkhnāma*

*Bism illāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm. Hādha mā awṣā bihi Abū Bakr ʿinda ākhir ʿahdihi bi-ʾl-dunyā khārijan minhā wa-ʿinda awwal ʿahdihi bi-l-ākhira dākhilan fīha ḥayna yaṣduqu al-kādhib wa-yatūbu al-fājir wa-yuʾminu al-kāfir innī wallaytu wa-istakhlaftu ʿalaykum ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb fa-in barra wa-ʿadala fa-dhāka ẓannī bihi wa rajāʾī fīhi wa-in jāza fa-ẓalama fa-lā ʿilm lī bi-l-khayr wa-ʾl-khayrāt wa lā yaʿlamu al-ghayb ilā allāh wa saya ʿlamu alladhīna ẓalamū ay munqalabin yanqalibūn.*

*II. Kitāb al-Futūḥ*

*Hādha mā awṣā bihi Abū Bakr ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUthmān ʿinda ākhir ʿahdihi bi-ʾl-dunyā fa-huwa khārijun minhā wa-awwal ʿahdihi bi-ʾl-ākhira wa-huwa dākhilun fīhā innahu istakhlafa ʿalā al-umma ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, fa-in qaṣada al-ḥaqq fa-dhāka ẓannī bihi wa-rajā-ī fīhi wa-in badala wa ghayyara fa-li-kulli amr mā iktasaba wa-sayaʿlamu alladhīna ẓalamū ay munqalabin yanqalibūn.*

The version in the *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* is admittedly somewhat shorter than that in the *Tārīkhnāma* despite being the earlier text. It may be that the rather late extant manuscripts of the former have abridged the text, or alternatively merely that the material was derived from an unknown source common to Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī and the *Tārīkhnāma*. It is interesting to note that neither the passages relating to Central Asia nor the will of Abu Bakr exist in Add 836. The latter manuscript does record Abu Bakr's appointment of ʿUmar as his successor, but not in these precise terms. At the very least, this suggests that the passage was probably not excized for sectarian reasons in the Shīʿite environment in which the manuscript was copied. Moreover, there would be no obvious reason to delete material on the presumably innocuous topic of the Muslim conquest of Central Asia.

These facts indicate that the interpolation of passages either directly derived from or common to Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī dates to some point after the mid-fifth/eleventh century when the Arabic translation of Balʿamī was

70 *Tārīkhnāma*, III, p. 422.

71 Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*, M. ʿAbd al-Muʿīn Khān (ed.), Hyderabad: Majlis Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1968, I, pp. 152–3.

composed. There also exists a Persian translation of Ibn Aʿtham, made around 596/1199 by Haravī, which, just like Balʿamī's *Tārīkhnāma*, swiftly eclipsed its Arabic

original in popularity. This, however, is not the *Tārīkhnāma's* source for documents such as Abu Bakr's will are given there in Persian translation and not in Arabic at all. It seems likely that the passages from Ibn A'tham were added at some point between the eleventh and the end of the twelfth centuries, after which point one would expect Haravī's Persian version to have been used.

One of the clear indication that these passages were interpolated after Bal'amī's time is the especial instability of the text at these points. Although many Persian manuscripts include these passages (e.g. RAS, Persian 22 and Fatih 4285), by no means all do. For example, the discussion of Qutayba's campaigns in Central Asia in Fatih 4281 is much shorter than in most manuscripts, and the conquest of Samarqand is scarcely mentioned at all, and certainly not the peace treaty. Instead, the manuscript gives a long description of the Muslim capture of the town of Baykand, material which it claims to have taken from a *Kitāb Abū 'l-Futūḥ*, doubtless a reference to Ibn A'tham's book.[72] Similarly, while it does contain the Arabic text of Abu Bakr's will, its account of the circumstances concerning his death is reduced to a few lines.[73] To take another example, Bodleian, Ouseley 206–8 mentions the conquest of Samarqand but does not give the text of the peace treaty,[74] and has no record of Abu Bakr's will.[75] Similarly, Laud Or 323, an early manuscript, does not record either text, although it is quite detailed on Qutayba's campaigns.[76] Meanwhile, Aya Sofya 3050 does contain the Arabic text of Abu Bakr's will, but its account of the capture of Samarqand is very different to that found elsewhere, with no text of the peace treaty and instead numerous quotations of verse.[77] The existence of so many variants indicates that this material did not exist in Bal'amī's original text and so subsequent copyists supplied it from various other sources. It thus offers further evidence that the conservative text of Add 836, which omits this material, has been subject to less alteration than the Persian manuscripts.

The incorporation of material from the *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* is intriguing, as the low number of extant manuscripts does not suggest it was particularly popular—an impression which is, admittedly, countered by the existence of Haravī's Persian translation.[78] Its citation in the *Tārīkhnāma* offers further evidence that it was better known in the Middle Ages than one might imagine. In style it contains many similarities to the *Tārīkhnāma*, dispensing with *isnāds* and *akhbār* to create a popular, readable narrative. This is doubtless, at least in part, the reason why it was chosen as a source of additional material for the *Tārīkhnāma*, according to the evidence cited above probably by later copyists rather than Bal'amī himself.

72 Fatih 4281, f. 325b.
73 Fatih 4281, f. 257b.
74 Bodleian, Ouseley 206–8, f. 401a.
75 Bodleian, Ouseley 206–8, ff. 292b-293a.
76 Bodleian, Laud 323, f. 144a.
77 Süleymaniye, Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 254a, 327b-328b.
78 On the manuscripts of the *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* see Togan, 'Ibn A'tham al-Kufi'. pp. 249–251.

**New themes in the *Tārīkhnāma***

The emphasis given by Bal'amī and Ṭabarī to certain topics varies immensely, yet as ever the complex textual situation makes it difficult to judge to what extent this is due to the activities of later copyists or genuine differences of approach between the two. Contrary to what one might expect, there is no evidence that the *Tārīkhnāma* puts more emphasis on tales of the Iranian past than Ṭabarī. If anything, the reverse is true, for the *Tārīkhnāma* actually tends to show more interest in pre-Islamic history, especially tales of prophets, than Ṭabarī. For example, to use a blunt but simple tool to measure this, we may observe that pre-Islamic material comprises only one and a half volumes out of ten in Ibrāhīm's edition of Ṭabarī, but two volumes out of five in Rawshan's edition of the *Tārīkhnāma*.[79] The table below records proportions of the text devoted to pre-Islamic themes in selected early manuscripts. To allow a more accurate impression of the range of variation among the Persian manuscripts, I have recorded statistics for three additional manuscripts: the eighth/fourteenth century British Library, Add 7622 and Süleymaniye 4281, and the ninth/fifteenth century Bodleian Ouseley 206–8.

Lest it be thought that these figures are arrived at by an increase in Iranian material in the same manuscripts, let us also consider the approximate proportions of text devoted to pre-Islamic Iranian history (the remaining material is *Isrā'īliyyāt* or concerned with creation, with a negligible amount of space devoted to pre-Islamic kings of Yemen):

*Table 3.1* Proportions of text devoted to pre-Islamic history in selected manuscripts of the *Tārīkhnāma*.

| | |
|---|---|
| Ṭabarī | 15% |
| Add 836 | 30% |
| RAS Persian 22 | 39% |
| British Library, Add 7622 | 31% |
| Bodleian, Ouseley 206–8 | 33% |
| Süleymaniye, Aya Sofya 3050 | 40% |
| Süleymaniye, Fatih 4285 | 41% |
| Süleymaniye, Fatih 4281 | 44% |

79 Ibrāhīm's edition is more readily comparable with Rawshan's than is de Goeje's as the pages are of a similar size.

*Table 3.2* Proportion of text of the pre-Islamic sections of the *Tārīkhnāma* devoted to Iranian history (up to the *Genealogy of Muḥammad*).

| | |
|---|---|
| Ṭabarī | 26% |
| Add 836 | 20% |
| RAS Persian 22 | 29% |
| British Library, Add 7622 | 15% |
| Bodleian, Ouseley 206–8 | 21% |
| Süleymaniye, Aya Sofya 3050 | 20% |
| Süleymaniye, Fatih 4285 | 25% |
| Süleymaniye, Fatih 4281 | 36% |

It is clear from the above statistics that Balʿamī was much more interested in pre-Islamic history than Ṭabarī was. Nor does the greater attention he paid to pre-Islamic history seem to be due to any particular interest in the Iranian past: only Süleymaniye, Fatih 4281 sustains this interpretation, the statistical difference between RAS, Persian 22 and Ṭabarī being insignificant. The consensus of all manuscripts suggests that Balʿamī omitted material of obvious contemporary relevance. Topics which one might have thought would have been important to Balʿamī and the Sāmānids, such as the rise of the dynasty, found no place in the *Tārīkhnāma*. Far from emphasizing either recent or Iranian history, Balʿamī's interests were above all in pre-Islamic prophets.

### *Prophecy and its importance in the fourthltenth century*

Prophecy and prophethood were topics of crucial importance in the Islamic Middle Ages. Muḥammad's status as the *khātam al-nabiyyīn* (Q. 33.40), 'the seal of the prophets', is one of the cornerstones of Islam, and it is natural that prophecy became a central theme in Islamic historiography.[80] The Muslims' interest in Biblical and Arabian prophets was precipitated by the need to explain and expand the frequently cursory and allusive references to them in the Qur'ān, and to affirm that Muḥammad was both part of and the seal of this tradition of prophecy. Muslim historians from the time Ibn Isḥāq (d. 151/761) onwards, notably Yaʿqūbī (d. 284/897) and Dīnawarī (d. 282/895) had

80 F.M.Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: the beginnings of Islamic historical writing*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998, p. 147.

devoted some space to Muḥammad's predecessors among the prophets, but this practice found its fullest mediaeval expression in Ṭabarī's *History*.[81]

While most Muslims, including many regarded as unorthodox such as the Ismā'īlīs, affirmed the prophethood of Muḥammad as an integral part of their faith, the intellectual ferment of the fourth/tenth century had provided an opportunity for alternative views to appear, in particular amongst the radicals known as the freethinkers, or *zanādiqa*.[82] The freethinkers attempted to discredit the concept of prophecy by showing that throughout history prophets had been frauds and imposters. One of the most notable of those who challenged the concept of prophethood was Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 313/ 925 or 323/935), who wrote the *Kitāb Makhārīq al-Anbiyā'*, or 'Book on the Prophets' Fraudulent Tricks'.[83] Rāzī's views may have rendered him a rather marginal figure, at least from a theological viewpoint, but they were nonetheless worthy of having a refutation written of them, the *Kitāb A'lām al-Nubuwwa* by the Ismā'īlī Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, and other writers such as Bīrūnī and 'Āmirī (himself patronized by the Sāmānid court at one point) explicitly disassociated themselves from him.[84] All Muslim opinion, Sunnī, Shī'ite or Ismā'īlī found Rāzī's assault on the very basis of their religion distasteful. Yet, as Stroumsa stresses, that does not mean he was uninfluential, for he introduced freethinking into both Ismā'īlī and Sunnī circles that were interested in philosophy. As a result, by the middle of the fourth/tenth century orthodox theologians had to devote substantial efforts to combating the heresy of freethinking.[85]

However, the freethinkers were by no means the only group that was especially concerned with prophecy. It is not a coincidence that an Ismā'īlī wrote a refutation of Abū Bakr al-Rāzī's views on prophets, for the question of prophecy lay at the heart of Ismā'īlī cosmology. Ismā'īlīs believed that the lifespan of the world was divided into seven eras, in each of which a prophet (*nāṭiq*) would appear with a message, the sixth of whom was Muḥammad. Each *nāṭiq* was followed by an *imām*, who would subsequently become a *nāṭiq*. The seventh and final *nāṭiq* would be the seventh *imām* Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, the Mahdī who would bring a reign of justice to earth at the end of time.

81 R.Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān and Musl*im Literature, Richmond: Curzon, 2002, pp. 129–134. Later there developed a type of literature known as *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, devoted entirely to recounting the lives and deeds of prophets.

82 S.Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rāwandī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī and their impact on Islamic thought*, Leiden: Brill, 1999, p. 21.

83 For details, see ibid, p. 93 ff.

84 Ibid, pp. 87–120.

85 Ibid, p. 120.

Among Twelver Shīʿites too, there was a particular interest in tales of the early Israelite prophets.[86] Shīʿites held that authority was delegated (*naṣṣ*) not just from the Israelite prophets to Muḥammad, but from Muḥammad to ʿAlī and then on to the Shīʿite imams. The imams were considered to be 'legatees' (*awṣiyā'*, sing, *waṣī*) of the prophets. ʿAlī's own position was thus considered to be parallel to those of the prophets, as were the imams, their direct heirs.[87] One major fourth/tenth century Shīʿite theologian explained:

> Our belief concerning their number is that in all there have been one hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets and a like number of *awsiyā'*. Each *nabī* (prophet) had a *waṣī* to whom he gave instructions by the command of Allāh… And verily, the leaders of the prophets are five in number round whom the heavens revolve, and they are the masters of the religious paths (*aṣḥābu 'sh-sharā'i'*), namely, 'the ones endued with firmness'—Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad, on all of whom be peace. Muḥammad is their leader and the most excellent of them.[88]

Such views had found their way into the historiographical tradition at an early date. Rubin argues that the main point of Ibn Isḥāq's traditions about the Israelite prophets was to show this transmission of *waṣiyya*,[89] although the state of the text of Ibn Isḥāq's works must make any such conclusion tentative.

Nonetheless, the mere fact that a historian had Shīʿite tendencies did not necessarily lead to a reflection of this in his treatment of prophecy. A good example of this is the Shīʿite historian and philosopher Miskawayh, a near contemporary of Balʿamī's, writing for the Sāmānids' Būyid rivals in Arabic. In his great *Tajārib al-Umam* ('Experiences of Nations') he entirely omits any account of the pre-Islamic prophets, saying there is no place for tales of miracles in his work, 'as the people of our age cannot profit from their experiences'.[90] Miskawayh was trying to write a very different kind of X

86 U.Rubin, 'Prophets and progenitors in the early Shīʿa tradition' *JSAI* 1(1979), pp. 41–65, esp. p. 51.

87 Ibid, p. 53; A.Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shīʿism: ḥadīth as discourse between Qumm and Baghdad*, Richmond: Curzon, 2000, p. 194.

88 Ibn Bābawayh, *A Shiʿite Creed: A Translation of* Iʿtiqādātu 'l-imāmiyyah (tr. A.Fyzee), Tehran: World Organisation of Islamic Services, 1983, p. 83.

89 Rubin, 'Prophets and progenitors', p. 57.

90 Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-Umam*, S. Ḥasan (ed.), Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1424/2003, I, p. 60.

Thus for Ṭabarī and Balʿamī, prophecy was not merely a fundamental tenant of 86 U.Rubin, 'Prophets and progenitors in the early Shīʿa tradition' *JSAI* 1(1979), pp. 41–65, esp. p. 51.

history to that of Balʿamī and Ṭabarī. He had no interest in their tradition-based approach, but rather was concerned with what could be verified by reason. Ultimately, he too wished to provide his audience with moral lessons, but believed this could best be done through presenting detailed accounts of men's behaviour rather than the sort of romantic *Isrāʾīliyyāt* transmitted by Wahb b. Munabbih that finds such a prominent place in Ṭabarī's and Balʿamī's works. It must be said that Miskawayh's approach to historiography found few imitators.

Islam and a vital part of Muslim and pre-Islamic history, but a dogma which had come under attack (from the freethinkers) or been distorted (by the Shīʿites and Ismāʿīlīs). This may be one reason why they devote more attention to it than earlier historians.[91] Freethinkers had existed at the Sāmānid court in earlier times, most notably Naṣr b. Aḥmad's vizier Abū ʿAbdallāh Jayhānī. Yet the simple style and accessible form of the Persian *Tārīkhnāma* do not suggest it was specifically aimed at the salons of the rationalists and freethinkers.

Freethinking and Shīʿism were not the sole concerns which made prophecy relevant in Balʿamī's time. An interesting parallel between the *Tārīkhnāma* and the *Sīra* of the Prophet by Ibn Isḥāq may be observed. Just as Balʿamī's translation was commissioned by royal command, the *Sīra* was written by order of the ʿAbbāsid Caliph Manṣūr (d. 158/775). Ibn Isḥāq's work in its original form comprised traditions concerning creation, pre-Islamic prophets, the life of the Prophet, and the Prophet's *maghāzī* (military expeditions). Only the section on the life of the Prophet survives, but it is clear that Ibn Isḥāq's work in its original form had much in common with Ṭabarī's treatment of world history, influencing both the conception and form of the *History*.[92] Tottoli argues that political concerns were one of the foremost reasons for Manṣūr's commissioning of the *Sīra:*

> In a period of ongoing political development, with the Umayyad dynasty just defeated, stabilizing and isolating the experiences of Muḥammad in a sacred history that began with the origins of the world may have served to remove any religious emphasis from movements of that time that could contest the legitimacy of the ʿAbbāsid power.[93]

91 The printed edition of Dīnawarī, for example, has fewer than 10 of the first 74 pages (i.e. up to the coming of Islam) devoted to prophets. See Dīnawarī, *al-Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, ʿA. ʿĀmir & J.al-Shayyāl (eds), Cairo: ʿĪsā Bāb al-Ḥalabī, 1960. Likewise, Yaʿqūbī allots around the first 90 pages of his *Taʾrīkh*, less than a third of the pre-Islamic section of 313 pages, to material relating to *Isrāʾīliyyāt*. See *Taʾrīkh al-Yaʿqūbī*, M.Houtsma (ed.), Leiden: Brill, 1883, I.

92 Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, p. 130.

93 Ibid, p. 130.

There are parallels with the Sāmānids' situation: much of the chaos of the age had been caused by the 'Abbāsids' decline as an effective political force, and the Sāmānids remained the only substantial power loyal to the Baghdad caliphate and committed to upholding Sunnism. Meanwhile, the Muslim world as a whole abounded in religious movements or, worse still, states which relied for their credibility and legitimacy on challenging the 'Abbāsids, Ḥanafī orthodoxy, and their Sāmānid supporters. So the Sāmānids, just like the earlier 'Abbāsids, may have wished to remove the 'religious emphasis' from such movements by promoting their own, orthodox, version of history.

Such changes in the political environment may be one reason why Ṭabarī gives proportionally much less space to pre-Islamic history and prophets than Bal'amī does. While the 'Abbāsid state was doubtless in severe trouble, if not crisis, by the time of his death in 310/923,[94] it had not yet suffered the humiliations that marked its ultimate failure, such as the Caliph's abandonment of claims to secular power with the appointment of Ibn Rā'iq as *amīr al-umarā'* in 324/936 and the Būyid occupation of Baghdad in 334/945. Nor had the Fāṭimids yet become anything more than a local power in distant North Africa, and the scandal of the Qarmaṭī sack of the Ka'ba was yet to come (in 317/930). Shī'ism had always had some hold on the people of Iraq, but it was only later during the fourth/tenth century—after the completion of the Arabic *History*—that it started to become such a clearly defined movement. In these circumstances, it is understandable that Bal'amī should have been more concerned than Ṭabarī to emphasize the historical antecedents from which the *umma* drew its legitimacy, in particular the Sunni view of prophecy.

However, it would be simplistic to consider Bal'amī's preoccupation with prophecy solely as a consequence of the heterodox movements prevalent in the Islamic world at the time, still less as a direct response to them. Other motives may have underlain it. Daniel has suggested that the conversion of the Turks of Central Asia to Islam in large numbers at this period may necessitated the composition of such a work with its emphasis on the orthodox Muslim perception of the past.[95] In view of the numerous Arabic quotations in the *Tārīkhnāma* it seems unlikely the text was intended as a purely pedagogical tool for such an audience, to whom much of the text would have been incomprehensible (indeed, this is probably true even if all the Arabic in the *Tārīkhnāma* had been translated into Persian). Rather, Bal'amī's interest in prophecy is probably a direct consequence of his traditionalist approach to history, which aimed to appeal to a religiously conservative audience. Maqdisī, probably writing for the similarly conservative Ṣaffārids, evinces a similar interest in prophecy, for the chapter on prophets is the longest in the

94 While the early part of the Caliph Muqtadir's reign (295/908–320/932) had been 'comparatively successful', by around this date old problems re-emerged, in particular the depredations of the desert Qarāmiṭa. See H.Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: the Islamic Near East from the sixth to the eleventh century*, London: Longman 1986, p. 193ff.

95 Daniel, 'The Samanid "Translations" of Tabari' in H.Kennedy (ed.), *Al-Ṭabarī: a medieval Muslim historian and his work*, Princeton: Darwin Press, forthcoming, [p. 12].

96 Tahmi, *L'Encyelopédisme musulman*, p. 240.

*Kitāb al-Bad' wa-'l-Ta'rīkh*.[96] ʿĀmirī, the Transoxianan philosopher who vainly sought to appeal to the ulema of the *mashriq*, even tried to associate Greek philosophers such as Empedocles and Pythagoras with the prophetic tradition.[97] Quite simply, conservative Transoxianan society probably valued stories of prophets more highly than accounts of contemporary history, let alone Greek philosophers. This attitude towards the past was doubtless also the reason why Balʿamī devotes so little attention to more recent events.

### *The problem of the terminus of the* Tārīkhnāma

The final sections of the *Tārīkhnāma* demonstrate particular textual instability, and the terminus of manuscripts varies greatly. Add 836 has as its terminus the death of the Umayyad Marwān III in battle with the ʿAbbāsids in 132/750. Although most of the Persian manuscripts continue to later dates, the quantity and quality of information that they provide tends to become increasingly slight the more recent the date. Often there are little more than brief notices for events after the civil war between al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn (193/809–198/813), and many of these were clearly added by later copyists to update the work. Ṭabarī, on the other hand, continued the chronicle up to his own day, ending it in 302/914–5. Admittedly, his style changes somewhat, with a much less frequent use of *isnāds:* authorities are often not cited at all, with accounts being introduced by terse phrases such as *dhukira,* 'it was mentioned'. This is doubtless at least in part because the author himself or his associates had been eyewitnesses to these events, and because it was less necessary to strive so hard to prove the veracity of reports of events within the living memory of the work's audience.[98] The detail varies greatly from year to year from the beginning of the third/ninth century onwards, with some years, particularly towards the end of the *Ta'rīkh*, dismissed in two or three pages under a title such as *Dhikr al-khabar ʿammā kāna fīhā min al-aḥdāth*, Account of What Happened in the Year. This lack of interest in contemporary history is reflected in the Persian manuscript tradition, as the table below indicates.

97 Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher*, pp. 206–8

98 See T.El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Arabic Historiography: Hārūn al-Rashīd and the narrative of the 'Abbasid Caliphate*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 216–7 for further details on the later parts of Ṭabarī and the importance of the annalistic method, and p. 219 for a discussion of his use of the *isnād*.

*Table 3.3* Proportion of the total text of selected manuscripts of the *Tārīkhnāma* devoted to events occurring after the death of Marwān in 132/750.

| | |
|---|---|
| Ṭabarī | 27% |
| Add 836 | 0 |
| RAS Persian 22 | 7% |
| British Library, Add 7622 | 19% |
| Bodleian, Ouseley 206–8 | 21% |
| Süleymaniye, Aya Sofya 3050 | 13% |
| Süleymaniye, Fatih 4285 | 8% |
| Süleymaniye, Fatih 4281 | 8% |

All the manuscripts examined indicate that the *Tārīkhnāma* devotes considerably less attention to ʿAbbāsid history than Ṭabarī did, although the exact point at which it ended is unclear. Some evidence suggests that 132/ 750 was the actual terminus of the *Tārīkhnāma*. All the manuscripts of the anonymous Arabic translation concur on this date (although Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Sprenger 45 ends slightly earlier in the year than the others, almost certainly due to its fragmentary nature).

The unanimity of the Arabic manuscripts of the *Tārīkhnāma* indicates that the work's original terminus may have been 132/750. Further evidence that this was the true terminus comes from Bodleian, Laud Or 323, another early if highly eclectic manuscript. At the start of the account of the ʿAbbāsids after their seizure of power, the manuscript contains the statement, 'Muḥammad b. Jarīr [Ṭabarī] relates ʿAbbāsid history (*akhbār Banī 'l-ʿAbbās*) patchily, and it should be recounted in full if it is to be recounted properly. God willing, I shall relate it in full and state which events happened in which years.'[99] Unlike most other Persian manuscripts, this one does indeed continue in a broadly annalistic fashion.[100] The statistics cited in Table 3.3 suggest that Balʿamī's text is more likely than Ṭabarī's to curtail discussion of the ʿAbbāsids, and as demonstrated in Chapter 2, references in the *Tārīkhnāma* to Ṭabarī often refer to manuscripts of the *Tārīkhnāma* itself. The fact that Laud Or 323 henceforth adopts a narrative structure different from that found elsewhere suggests that ʿAbbāsid history was indeed omitted from the original text, obliging the scribe to use another source for his account of this period.

99 Bodleian, Laud Or 323, f. 239a.

100 E.g. note the mentions of the years at the start of each chapter on ff. 246a, 247a, 256b, 259b, 260a etc.

Moreover, 132/750 would have been a convenient point to conclude, with the death of Marwān ushering in a new era of ʿAbbāsid domination. There is no reason why Balʿamī should necessarily have been interested in recent history. Although Ṭabarī had continued his *History* up to his own day, the volume of information he provides lessens and his emphasis is on earlier periods. Likewise, Yaʿqūbī and Dīnawarī had ended their chronicles a good half-century before their deaths. Robinson has well summarized the attitude of the mediaeval Islamic chronographer:

> Traditionism's reverence for *its own past*, combined with a corresponding indifference towards the present, seems to have conditioned the historiographic project. Chronography is a case in point. The very occasional exception aside, throughout the early period, the *akhbārīs* usually sacrificed contemporary history in their devotion to the early, foundational moments of Islamic history…. Ṭabarī only reluctantly says much about his own day: no more than 10 per cent of his monumental *Taʾrīkh* is concerned with contemporary history. Meanwhile, many historians said nothing at all, concentrating upon the Glorious (such as Prophetic history and the great conquests of the seventh century), the Tragic (especially the Civil War of the 650s) or the Curious….[101]

So there was no need for Balʿamī to continue his *Tārīkhnāma* into recent times, his interests being above all in the Glorious and the Tragic, to adopt Robinson's terminology, the topics which concern Ṭabarī too above all. Indeed, Ṭabarī's treatment of the ʿAbbāsid caliphs is by no means unambiguously enthusiastic,[102] and this may be one reason that Balʿamī, working for a dynasty the legitimacy of which was closely linked to their links to the ʿAbbāsids, decided to omit this section. For his interest was not recent history, but the careers of the prophets, culminating with Muḥammad, and the torturous adolescence of the *umma*.

101 Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, p. 94.
102 El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, pp. 172–4.

# 4
# The contents and purpose of Balʿamī's alterations to Ṭabarī's *History*

Balʿamī's alterations to Ṭabarī's *History* were not limited to matters of methodology and emphasis. Often Balʿamī's versions of events differ substantially in detail and in tone from Ṭabarī's. Such differences have been attributed to Balʿamī's allegedly distinctively Persian perspective,[1] or, alternatively, to attempts to convince members of non-Muslim communities of the *mashriq* 'of the truth of Islam as mediated by the Sāmānids, legitimate Persian-Islamic rulers of the east' by including Jewish, Christian and Zoroastrian traditions absent in Ṭabarī.[2] This so-called 'Persian perspective' in the *Tārīkhnāma* is also seen as part of an attempt to encourage the 'Persianization of frontier areas and the acculturation of the new Turkish military elite'.[3] The need to combat Ismāʿīlism has also been cited as a reason for the composition of the Persian *Tārīkhnāma* and *Tafsīr* and their reshaping of their originals.[4]

This chapter aims to test by these theories through a detailed comparison of key passages from the original Arabic *History* and its adaptation by Balʿamī. It must be stressed that this analysis is offered only tentatively, for the textual tradition of the *Tārīkhnāma* places severe obstacles in the way of a more detailed study, as it is always difficult to be certain what, exactly, Balʿamī did write. Nonetheless, even if only on a hypothetical basis, it seems worthwhile trying to understand how and why Balʿamī altered Ṭabarī's text. As in the previous chapter, conclusions about the contents of the *Tārīkhnāma* are based on Add 836 and three of the oldest complete Persian manuscripts, with all major variants recorded in the notes. Despite sometimes substantial differences, a generally consistent picture of Balʿamī's treatment of Ṭabarī emerges.

The passages studied below deal with themes likely to have been of special relevance in fourth/tenth century Transoxiana. For instance, we will examine Balʿamī's and Ṭabarī's treatments of the *Ridda* wars, the fight against apostasy led by the Caliph Abu Bakr after Muḥammad's death. If, as Daniel and Meisami suggest, one of the motivations for the composition of the *Tārīkhnāma* was the fight against heresy, such a

1 J.S.Meisami, *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999, pp. 29–30.
2 Ibid, p. 35.
3 E.Daniel, 'The Samanid "Translations" of Ṭabarī' in H.Kennedy (ed.) *Al-Ṭabarī: a medieval Muslim historian and his work*, Princeton: Darwin Press, forthcoming, [p. 12].
4 Ibid, [pp. 11–12].

topic would have been highly relevant and one would expect to find this reflected in Balʿamī's treatment of it. Other passages examined focus on episodes in Islamic history that were in any event controversial for sectarian reasons, such as the murder of the Shīʿite hero Ḥusayn, grandson of ʿAlī. Differences between Balʿamī's and Ṭabarī's accounts of this issue may shed light on their respective sectarian allegiances. However, not every passage under consideration was of potentially controversial character. The story of the prophet Abraham, for instance, is discussed in order to show how Ṭabarī's text might be adapted even when it dealt with a topic that was an accepted part of mainstream Muslim tradition. Other episodes, such as those of Bahrām Chūbīn and Alexander the Great, were recorded not just by Ṭabarī but also by Firdawsī in his *Shāhnāma*, allowing us to compare Balʿamī's treatment of them with two very different models, Ṭabarī's tradition-based history of the *umma* and Firdawsī's epic devoted to preserving the memory of the Iranian past.

The results of this study contradict previous scholarship, for there is no evidence in the text to support the contention that Balʿamī wrote his history from a specifically Persian perspective. Recording the career of Alexander, a major figure in both Iranian and Islamic tradition, Balʿamī shows no interest in the Iranian accounts recorded by Firdawsī and Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī which transmit pro-Sāsānian and Zoroastrian traditions. Rather, his narrative is thoroughly Islamic in character, drawing on the Qurʾān as his main source. The few references, if genuine, to non-Muslim sources do not counteract the impression that the *Tārīkhnāma* was aimed above all at a pious Muslim audience that revered tradition. At points where one would anticipate that the Iranian past would have been of particular interest to Balʿamī, such as the role of the Persians in suppressing the *Ridda*, he avoids putting any emphasis on it. Even his treatment of the Sāmānids' putative ancestor, Bahrām Chūbīn, is curiously muted. Balʿamī's concern was Islamic, not Iranian, history, and to see the *Tārīkhnāma* as a product of state-sponsored Persian nationalism is erroneous.

Likewise, a close study of the text does not offer any evidence to suggest it was composed to combat heresy. At no point is there any direct polemic against views that Balʿamī found disagreeable, and there are no allusions to Ismāʿīlī, Shīʿite or other doctrines that were influential in the fourth/tenth century Muslim world. Of course, to a certain extent just by presenting a view of history contrary to these, Balʿamī rebuts them, but it seems unlikely that his work was calculated to win over anyone already influenced by Shīʿite or freethinking alternatives. Yet at the same time, his treatment of the martyrdom of Husayn indicates that he sought to moderate or at least alter some of the anti-Shīʿite biases underlying Ṭabarī's original. The sheer scale of the success of the *Tārīkhnāma* among later generations of both Shīʿites and Sunnīs indicates that Balʿamī was largely successful in presenting a moderate version of Islamic history that had widespread appeal.

## Abraham, the Friend of God

The concept of prophecy, as discussed in Chapter 3, was of crucial importance to Muslim religious thought in the fourth/tenth century. It has been suggested that the debates triggered by the dogmatic positions of the freethinkers, the Ismā'īlīs and the Shī'ites may be one reason why Bal'amī devotes so much attention to the Israelite prophets. Space prevents a lengthy discussion of each one, so the analysis offered here is restricted to Bal'amī's narrative of the life of Abraham, one of the most important of the pre-Islamic prophets, who is named as one of the five 'leaders of the prophets' by the Shī'ite theologian Ibn Bābūya.[5] Many of the themes found in Bal'amī's account of Abraham's life are repeated in his treatment of other prophets.

Abraham's importance is underlined in the Qur'ān, where there are several references to *millat Ibrāhīm*, the faith of Abraham (16.123, 6.161, 3.95). These are usually accompanied by exhortations to follow this faith, thus giving Qur'ānic sanction to the view of Islam as a direct descendant of, or indeed the same thing as, *millat Ibrāhīm*. As Tottoli puts it, 'The Qur'ānic message is not therefore something new but coincides perfectly with the faith of Abraham, who is defined father of the believers and, as a consequence, a kind of first Muslim to whom Muḥammad's teaching is linked.'[6] The Qur'ān, however, contains only brief mentions of Abraham, and it was left to the exegetes to fill in the gaps, presumably drawing in particular on Jewish sources such as the *muḥaddith* Ka'b al-Aḥbār. Bal'amī's account has therefore a long tradition behind it, and there would have been innumerable sources other than Ṭabarī to which he could resort for alternative accounts or details.

The first chapter in the *Tārīkhnāma* on Abraham discusses his birth and early life.[7] The king of Babel, Nimrod, having received warnings from the astrologers that a child would be born who would overthrow him, orders all new born children to be killed. When Abraham's mother gives birth, she and her husband Azar, the treasurer of the temples, hide the child, thus ensuring his survival. Abraham's first sight of the natural world inspires in him belief in God.[8] On growing up, he destroys his father's idols, and so incurs Nimrod's wrath which is visited upon him after his father's death. A pyre is built for him, and Abraham is hurled in by a mangonel. The earth, skies and angels complain

5 See Chapter 3.

6 R.Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān and Muslim Literature*, Richmond: Curzon, 2002, p. 10.

7 Add 836, ff. 11b–12b; RAS, Persian 22 in *Tārīkhnāma-i Ṭabarī mansūb bi-Bal'amī*, M.Rawshan (ed.), Tehran: Soroush, 1378/1999, I, pp. 130–140; Fatih 4285, ff. 19b–21b; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 29b–32a.

8 The Persian manuscripts consulted have an explanatory story clarifying that Abraham did not think the stars themselves were God. (*Tārīkhnāma*, I, pp. 131–2; Fatih 4285, f. 20a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 20a.)

of Abraham's treatment, so God sends the angel Gabriel to his rescue,[9] yet Abraham rejects his assistance, and the angels 'wondered at the strength of his certainty in God'. God orders the fire to be cold and adopts Abraham as his *khalīl,* his friend, hence Abraham's sobriquet *khalīl Allāh,* the Friend of God. Even Nimrod wonders at the miracle, saying 'Abraham, how great is your god', but God rejects his sacrifices.

This section reflects themes typical of the *Tārīkhnāma's* stories of prophethood, and which are common in mediaeval Islamic accounts of prophets in general. There is a clash with temporal authority even before the prophet's birth, which means he has to be hidden, a motif repeated at the birth of Jesus, when God warns Mary of Herod's plan to kill her child, forcing her to flee to the oasis of Damascus [sic].[10] Like Muḥammad, Abraham spends his early life outside the city, and likewise, he does not come to God through theological debate but through knowledge of God's creation (cf. the Qur'ānic *Sūrat al-Raḥmān,* which enumerates the beauties of creation as reasons for belief). Most prophets endure trials similar to Abraham's, as Moses discovers with Pharaoh[11] and Joseph with Pharaoh,[12] although the figure of the king may be replaced by Iblīs (Satan), as in the case of Job.[13] These trials are often a chance for the prophets to show the certainty of their belief in God, which itself may be so strong as almost to be an *āya* or sign of prophethood, as it is here and with Job.

The next chapter is entitled the Account of Abraham's Flight *(Hijra),* in which Abraham and his family flee Nimrod.[14] The very first line of text takes the opportunity to draw a parallel with Muḥammad: 'Then God Exalted tested Abraham with flight *(hijra)* from his town and his house so he died in exile, just as he tested our Prophet, peace be upon him.' Some people had believed in Abraham, but kept this secret from Nimrod. After Azar's death, Abraham loses his protector, and Nimrod expels him for 'causing corruption in the kingdom'. Abraham goes into exile with the believers, mainly his relatives, among them his nephew Lot and his wife Sarah, his cousin. Initially they go

9 The Persian manuscripts record the story in this way as well, but some subsequently add that Ṭabarī claimed that Abraham was supported by an angel. This account is rejected (*Tārīkhnāma,* I, pp. 139–140; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 22a. This comment is not found in Fatih 4285).

10 Add 836, f. 50a; According to Aya Sofya 3050, f. 116a-b: they flee from Jerusalem to Egypt, but an alternative account is given (f. 116b) that the village was in Syria and that the villages there resemble those of Soghdiana. Fatih 4285, f. 97a and RAS, Persian 22 (*Tārīkhnāma,* I, p. 521) have a virtually identical text, adding that the information comes from the *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-'l-Mamālik.*

11 Add 836, f. 27a; *Tārīkhnāma,* I, pp. 291–306; Fatih 4285, ff. 45a–49a; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 64b–68a.

12 Add 836, f. 19b; *Tārīkhnāma,* I, pp. 206–214; Fatih 4285, ff. 32b–34b; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 47b–48b.

13 Add 836, ff. 22b–23b; *Tārīkhnāma,* I, pp. 238–244; Fatih 4285, ff. 39b–41b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 53a–54b.

14 Add 836, f. 12b; *Tārīkhnāma,* I, pp. 141–146; Fatih 4285, ff. 21b–22b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 32a–b.

to Ḥarrān where Sarah's father was king,[15] then to Egypt, from which the king expels them, and eventually they settle in Syria. As with Muḥammad, the protector is a pagan relative, Azar playing the part of Abū Ṭālib, with whose death the situation becomes intolerable, forcing the believers to *hijra*. At this point the narrative is interrupted by an account of the destruction of Nimrod, a predictably nasty affair. We then reach the Account of the Prophet Ishmael,[16] a brief account of the birth of Abraham's son Ishmael by his slave-girl Hagar and of Sarah's jealousy, the main purpose of which seems to be to justify circumcision as a device to control female desires.[17]

The following chapter is the Account of Abraham's Settling of Ishmael in the Sanctuary,[18] and is particularly important as it demonstrates fully the centrality of Abraham to Islam. Sarah regrets her jealousy of Hagar and asks Abraham to take the slave-girl and Ishmael away, which he does. Gabriel comes to tell him to leave them in the Sanctuary (*Ḥaram*) at Mecca. Abraham sees no buildings, plants or people, yet leaves Hagar and Ishmael by the Ka'ba, Hagar asking, 'Abraham, how can you leave a weak woman and a child here?' Abraham replies, 'God ordered me to do thus', and Hagar says, 'Then that is enough for me'.[19] Yet despite her faith, water runs out and she is unable to find any more. However, the baby Ishmael bursts into tears and hits the ground with his foot, and the spring of Zamzam bursts forth. Birds and crows gather round, rousing the curiosity of the tribe of Jurhum who are encamped a day's travel away. They enquire of Hagar who brought her there, and she replies 'God'. Hagar and Ishmael take up residence with the Jurhum. When Ishmael is three years old, Abraham asks Sarah permission to visit him. Sarah fears God too much to refuse, but makes the visit conditional on Abraham not dismounting from his horse or staying the night. As Mecca is 50 stages away,[20] God sends Abraham the miraculous horse Burāq, and he is able to make the journey in half a day. When Ishmael is five, Sarah gives birth to Isaac, and Hagar dies when Ishmael is 15.

Thus Abraham is shown to be the ultimate founder of Mecca as a settlement, through God's instructions to him transmitted by the angel Gabriel. The origins of Mecca's importance and Muslim worship there are implicitly traced back to Abraham. God's favour to Abraham and an explicit parallel with Muḥammad are noted by the story of the loan of Burāq, which was a horse also used by Muḥammad on his miraculous

15 A detail mentioned in RAS Persian 22 and Aya Sofya 3050 only with the comment that this was not a universally accepted story. It is given as an alternative account in Fatih 4285, f. 31b. See n. 23 below.

16 Add 836, f. 14a–b; *Tārīkhnāma*, I, pp. 151–152; Fatih 4285, f. 23a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 34a–b.

17 The Persian manuscripts add a *ḥadīth* giving further justification (*Tārīkhnāma*, I, p. 152; Fatih 4285, f. 23b; Aya Sofya, f. 34b).

18 Add 836, ff. 14b–15b; *Tārīkhnāma*, I, pp. 152–155, where it is not given a separate chapter heading, although it is in Aya Sofya 3050, f. 24b, and Fatih 4285, f. 23b.

19 *Tārīkhnāma*, I, p. 153; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 25a: Then God will protect us'. Fatih, f. 23a: 'Whatever God wants is pleasing to us'.

20 *Tārīkhnāma*, I, p. 154; Fatih 4285, f. 23b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 25a: five days. Probably a misreading of *khamsīn* for *khamsa* in Add 836.

ascent to heaven, the *miʿrāj*. This underlines the links between the two prophets. Other elements in the passage serve to make moral points: the tale of Hagar and the water demonstrates that faith will be rewarded and that God takes care of his servants.

The Account of Abraham's Sacrifice of his Son[21] contains the lessons one would expect about obedience to God's commands and resisting the temptations of the Devil. For instance, Satan at one point comes to the boy's mother disguised as an old man and tells her that Abraham has taken her son to sacrifice. She tells him that that he is like the devil and says that God's prophet would not do something like that. He tells her that God ordered it, and the mother says that if God has commanded her son's sacrifice she is happy. The son is of course rescued, rewarding the woman's faith.

The passage is also marked by the use of Muslim phraseology. When Abraham is about to sacrifice his son, God sends Gabriel with a white ram in his place and turns his knife away, at which Gabriel cries out, *'Allāh akbar'*, Abraham replying with, *'Lā ilah illā Allāh wa-'llāh akbar.'* The son adds, *'Allāh akbar wa-li-'llāh al-ḥamd.'*[22] For the audience, these phrases would implicitly remind them of the links between Abraham and Islam, indeed, effectively implying that Abraham was a Muslim.

Balʿamī avoids giving an opinion on whether it was Isaac or Ishmael who was sacrificed until the end,[23] where he comments,

> The ulema differ on the *taf sīr* of this. It is said that he [the victim] was Isaac and that is the view of all the non-Arabs (*ʿAjam*) because they are his descendants. They argue on the basis of the divine word *'therefore We gave her glad tidings of Isaac, and, after Isaac, of Jacob'* (Q.11.74), that the structure of the Qur'ān indicates that the sacrificial victim was the one 'he was blessed with'. All the Arabs say he was Ishmael because they are his descendants.

Balʿamī quotes the Qur'ānic verses used by the Arabs in support of their claim (Q.37.101–2), and then gives his own view. He says the correct version is that it was Ishmael, but supports this contention not with the verses he has just cited but by a *ḥadīth*.[24] So Balʿamī not merely misses a chance at promoting the Persians, although it

21 Add 836, ff. 16a–17a; *Tārīkhnāma*, I, pp. 166–175. The Persian manuscripts contain a significant addition to the text in Add 836 (*Tārīkhnāma*, I, pp. 166–169; Fatih 4285, f. 32b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 27a). This is comprised of a detailed discussion of the nature of prophecy, mainly relating to Muḥammad.

22 Given in Arabic in the Persian manuscripts too: *Tārīkhnāma*, I, p. 174; Fatih 4285, f. 26b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 40a.

23 In the Persian manuscripts, this precedes the narrative of events, and the *ḥadīth* mentioned below is quoted before the Qur'ānic verses. The argument remains the same. *Tārīkhnāma*, I, pp. 169–171; Fatih 4285, f. 26a; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 38b–39a.

was an ideal chance to associate Islam and Iran, but even promotes the opposite view in its place. However, both the Arabic Add 836 and the Persian manuscripts concur on this interpretation, so it seems likely to be authentic.

Account of Abraham and Ishmael's Building of God's Sacred Abode,[25] recounts the rebuilding of the Ka'ba which God had moved to a mountain top for safety at the time of the flood. When it is complete, Abraham hands it over to Ishmael, saying, 'This is your place and the place of your descendants until the Day of Resurrection.' Abraham goes to Mt. Thabīr overlooking Mecca and sees barren mountains, and then looks towards Syria and recalls its verdure and the ease of life there, and is concerned for Ishmael and his descendants. He prays to God, *'Lord, make this land secure…'* (Q.14.39), and God answers his prayer. God tells Abraham to call people to the ḥajj, and they are taught to cry *labayka Allahum labayka lā sharīka laka*,[26] the very words used by Muslims today. The seal is therefore set on Abraham's role as a progenitor of Islam. Not only does he rebuild the shrine, but he teaches people the *ḥajj* and they learn the traditional pilgrims' cry.

Apart from the stylistic change from a narrative based on *akhbār* and *isnāds*, there are relatively few differences of actual facts in Bal'amī's and Ṭabarī's versions, although some do exist.[27] The main difference between them lies in Bal'amī's emphasis on Abraham as an early Muslim, a feature which characterizes his treatment of prophets elsewhere. This aspect is stressed through the parallels—sometimes, as in this instance, explicitly noted—between the prophets' lives and Muḥammad's, such as *hijra;* in the

24 The *ḥadīth* is a report from the Prophet saying that he was *Ibn al-Dhabīḥayn*, 'Son of two sacrificial victims', one being Ishmael, the other his father 'Abdallāh, whom 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib had promised to sacrifice to God in return for restoring water to Zamzam. 'Abdallāh is rescued by his mother, from the Banū Makhzūm, the rulers of Mecca, who asks the people for help, reminding them that a ram was sacrificed in place of Ishmael. An animal sacrifice was settled on his place. (RAS, Persian 22 and Fatih 4285 say his mother was from the Banū Zuhra; Aya Sofya 3050 keeps Banū Makhzūm.) This *ḥadīth* is also present in Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa-'l-Mulūk*, Leiden: Brill, 1879, I, p. 291 but in rather abbreviated form (although with the *isnād* which is naturally missing here), and without the explicit parallel drawn between 'Abdallāh and Ishmael. Bal'amī's treatment underlines the close connection between the Abrahamic and Islamic eras.

25 Add 836, f. 17a; *Tārīkhnāma*, I, pp. 176–180; Fatih 4285, ff. 26b-27b; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 40b–41b.

26 Given simply as *labayka* in RAS Persian 22 (*Tārīkhnāma*, I, p. 180), but in full in Fatih 4285, f. 27b and Aya Sofya 3050, f. 41a–b.

27 Examples of details which Bal'amī adds to Ṭabarī regarding the story of Abraham are: he gives the name of Sarah's father as Tabwīk, and says he was also Abraham's uncle (Add 836, f. 12b; in *Tārīkhnāma*, I, p. 179 and Aya Sofya 3050, f. 41b given as Tabwīl and transposed from earlier; Fatih 4285, f. 31b); he states that after the Pharaoh expelled Sarah and Abraham from Egypt, they traveled to the town of Saba' in Palestine where they settled briefly (Add 836, f. 13a; *Tārīkhnāma*, I, p. 144; Fatih 4285, f. 22a; Aya Sofya, f. 33a); he claims that Isaac married a woman named Ūrfaqāh bt. Tabwīk (Add 836, f. 17b; *Tārīkhnāma*, I, p. 182 (Ūrfaqā bt. Tabwīl); Fatih 4285, n/a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 41b).

introduction of prophetic *ḥadīths* into the narrative, again reminding the audience of the links to Islam; in the constant use of the Qur'ān, with much of the narrative actually composed of Qur'ānic quotations; in the use of Islamic terms such as *muslim*, *sharī'a* and *tawḥīd*,[28] which whether or not used with their Islamic meanings, still carry Islamic connotations; and in the attribution of Muslim practices to pre-Islamic figures.

Bal'amī's adaptation of the material is not especially original, for many of these devices may be found in Ṭabarī to varying degrees. He too sometimes attributes Muslim practices to the Israelite prophets, for example in references to Abraham being taught the *ḥajj* rituals,[29] as 'the basic duties of Islam are looked upon as the duties of "natural religion (*fiṭra*)"'.[30] However, Ṭabarī does not stress these practices to the extent that Bal'amī does. Bal'amī frequently uses the term *masjid* (mosque, in some manuscripts given in its archaic Persian form *mazgat*) to mean a place of worship in general—for instance, it is sometimes used for the Temple of Jerusalem.[31] There is no equivalent in Ṭabarī to Bal'amī's use of Islamic months, as in the accounts of the Exodus and Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai, both of which are dated according to the months of the *hijrī* calendar.[32] Indeed, sometimes the term *muslim* is explicitly used for those who follow the prophets.[33] For example, Alexander and Solomon are referred to as the two pre-Islamic *muslim* kings.[34] In one instance, a *ḥadīth* makes explicit this link between the Israelite prophets and Muḥammad: 'The Prophet (Muḥammad) said, "May God have mercy on my brother Moses. If he had been patient, he would have seen wondrous things. He was a sign *(āya)* which speaks to us."'[35] This *ḥadīth* is absent in Ṭabarī, and again links Muḥammad to his predecessor, his 'brother Moses'. Bal'amī's stress on the links between the Hebrew prophets and Islam underlines the antiquity of Islam and legitimizes

28 Moses learns *sharī'a* and *tawḥīd* when God makes him a prophet: Add 836, f. 26a–b; *Tārīkhnāma*, I, pp. 284, 289; Fatih 4285, f. 53a, Aya Sofya 3050, f. 62a.

29 Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, I, p. 312.

30 Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, II: *Prophets and Patriarchs* (tr. W.Brinner), Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987, p. 97, n. 246.

31 Add 836, f. 45b; *Tārīkhnāma*, I, p. 502; Fatih 4285, f. 93a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 112a.

32 10 Muharram/'Āshūrā' commemorates the crossing of the Red Sea: Add 836, ff. 27b–29a; *Tārīkhnāma*, I, p. 309; Fatih 4285, f. 58a; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 69a, 70b; Moses' ascent of Mt Sinai to receive the tablets of the sacred law dated to Dhū 'l-Qa'da: Add 836, f. 29a–b; *Tārīkhnāma*, I, p. 319; Fatih 4285, f. 60a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 66b.

33 The term, doubtless deliberately, has some ambiguity, meaning either 'one who submits to God' or 'a Muslim'. The word is used thus in the Qur'ān to describe Abraham. While the spelling used here will vary from *muslim* to Muslim depending on context, it should be borne in mind that often both implications are present.

34 Add 836, f. 11b; *Tārīkhnāma*, I, p. 130; Fatih 4285, f. 29b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 30a.

35 Add 836, f. 32b; Fatih 4285, f. 64a (in Arabic); *Tārīkhnāma*, I, p. 349 and Aya Sofya 3050, f. 79b, (in Persian): 'May God have mercy on my brother Moses. God tried my brother Moses; if he had had patience with Khiḍr, he would have seen wonders greater than these.'

it sthrough its roots in the past. He wishes to emphasize that although Muḥammad may have perfected religion, Islam arrived long before he did, and is the natural state of the God-fearing man. However, Balʿamī makes no attempt to address directly contemporary debates on prophethood. There is no condemnation of the Shīʿite concepts of *naṣṣ* and *waṣiyya*, nor is there any direct challenge to the ideas of the freethinkers and the Ismāʿīlīs. This is true of all Balʿamī's narratives of prophets. Of course, such ideas are implicitly condemned by the fact that they are ignored, but there is no suggestion of polemic in the *Tārīkhnāma's* treatment of them. This suggests that while Balʿamī must have been aware of the debates about prophecy of the fourth/tenth century, the *Tārīkhañma* was not intended specifically to counter heretical ideas, for in that case one would expect to find more direct references to them.

## Alexander, Dhū 'l-Qarnayn

The emphasis in the pre-Islamic sections is on tales of prophets, but Balʿamī does also devote some space to kings. Among these is Alexander the Great, who features prominently in both Iranian and Islamic tradition. Alexander's campaigns against the Persian emperor Darius are mentioned only briefly, Balʿamī's focus being on the Qur'ānic tales of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn, traditionally identified with Alexander.[36] The building of Herat, Marv and Samarqand is attributed to Alexander, and after conquering Tibet and China, he is reported to enter a land of darkness in search of the Spring of Life. Having failed to find it, he leaves and on his return dies in the town of Shahrazūr[37] near Ḥulwān. Thus far the account follows Ṭabarī in all but a few particulars,[38] although Ṭabarī is much more detailed on the defeat of Darius, which is passed over in a few lines by Balʿamī. However, Balʿamī then introduces his own story. He states[39] that Ṭabarī only mentioned what was recorded in the Qur'ān about Alexander, and notes the *ḥadīth* describing how the Meccans, unsure whether to believe Muḥammad, sent Abū Jahl to the Jews of Khaybar to learn some questions from the Torah the Prophet could be asked to test him. Among their suggestions was a question about Alexander, and

36 Add 836, ff. 47b–48b; *Tārīkhnāma*, I, pp. 491–495; Fatih 4285, ff. 90b–91b; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 107b–108b.

37 Add 836 merely reads *r-w-r* for this name; correct version in Ṭabarī and Persian manuscripts.

38 Ṭabarī has no reference to the building of these Transoxianan cities, and there is no reference to Ḥulwān. On the other hand, he gives more details about the size of Alexander's army.

39 In Add 836, these remarks are introduced by the phrase *qāla 'l-mutarjim*, 'the translator said'. Unlike Fatih 4285 and Aya Sofya 3050, RAS Persian 22 contains a rather abbreviated account of this *ḥadīth* and gives no indication that the material is not to be found in Ṭabarī. Otherwise, their accounts of Alexander are identical.

the angel Gabriel, stepping in at the crucial moment as so often, teaches Muḥammad the correct answer in the form of the Qur'ānic verses 18.83–98 which Bal'amī cites and explains at length. He discusses Alexander's wanderings and states that Alexander stayed in the west for a year 'calling people to Islam'.[40] He further cites two traditions, one of which argues Alexander was both a king and a prophet, the other of which argues he was not a prophet.[41] He does not state a preference for either, but resumes his narrative of Alexander's travels which have now directed themselves eastwards. In the extreme east Alexander finds a Muslim people, living between two mountains, who, although they do not know Greek, welcome him warmly. Alexander goes on beyond the two mountains and finds Gog and Magog.

> Gog and Magog were descendants of Japheth son of Noah. After the flood they settled in the extreme east behind the two mountains and bred. They have human faces and are two cubits high, while their ears drag on the ground. They wear no clothes…. They would attack the Muslims from behind these mountains, spread corruption among them, kill them.

The Muslims offer Alexander a reward *(kharāj)* if he will help them against this threat.[42] He replies, 'Protection of Muslims against enmity is a duty for kings, and money should not be taken for it',[43] and builds a dam between the two mountains to keep Gog and Magog out until the resurrection when they will break through.

Bal'amī concludes his account by quoting two *ḥadīths*. The first, on the authority of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and Ibn 'Abbās, affirms that the release of Gog and Magog will be one of the last signs of the resurrection, and they will cause a famine by eating all the crops and drinking all the waters of the Oxus and Tigris so it will be as if no water had ever been in them. The second, on the authority of 'Alī, says that every day 100,000 of the tribe of Gog and Magog will come to the dam and chip away at it until only a crust an egg-shell thick is left by the evening, when they will go home saying, 'Tomorrow we shall penetrate it.' Yet the next day it is invariably strong again. When it is time for the resurrection, there will be a Muslim boy who will tell them to start work by saying *bism allāh* and to look forward to its completion with *in shā' allāh*, and thus will they succeed.

Gog and Magog, living beyond the easternmost borders of Islam, cannot have failed to remind Bal'amī's audience of the still unconverted Turkic tribes beyond the Sāmānid frontier. They shared the same ancestry as the Turks, as the reference to their distant progenitor Japheth, son of Noah, recalls. Bal'amī had remarked, 'The Turks, the Slavs, Gog and Magog, and whoever has no good in him, are descended from Japheth.'[44] The

40 RAS, Persian 22 and Fatih 4285, Aya Sofya 3050: 'calling them to God'.
41 *Tārīkhnāma,* I, p. 491; Fatih 4285, f. 91a–b; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 108b-109a.
42 Citing Q.18.94.
43 The Persian manuscripts cite Q.18.95, explained as 'How could you give me anything better than the kingship from east to west that God has given me?'
44 Add 836, f. 8b; *Tārīkhnāma,* I, p. 101. Fatih 4285, f. 17a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 23b.

depiction of Gog and Magog as primitive brutes was very probably the popular view in Bukhārā of the Turks. The reference to Gog and Magog drinking the Oxus and Tigris dry is possibly an expression of concern at the consequences of the large numbers of Turks coming to live at the heart of the Sāmānid and ʿAbbāsid realms. More pointed still is the *ḥadīth* attributed to ʿAlī which effectively states that when this people converts (or pretends to convert) to Islam, they will destroy the world.

This is one of very few instances when it seems possible to read a reference to contemporary affairs in the *Tārīkhnāma*. If the interpretation suggested above is correct, is intriguing that the text should be so hostile to the Turks, who had by this stage become a powerful force in every level of the Sāmānid state, as has been discussed in Chapter 1. Even more surprising is the implied hostility to the Turkish conversion to Islam, and the suggestion this will end in disaster. It is certainly contradictory to Daniel's argument that the work may have been written to educate converted Turks, unless the hope was that they would so entirely assimilate and Persianize themselves that they would forget their Turkish origins—a vain hope. Furthermore, in such a context the passage implies that the end of the world is nigh, while Daniel has argued that the *Tārīkhnāma* was composed precisely to counter such views.[45]

It is natural that concern about the Turks should have been at the forefront of Balʿamī's mind. The disparate pagan Turks of the steppes may have caused annoyance from time to time, but the true threat to the dynasty came from the converted Turks. Some years later Balʿamī, doing a second and apparently rather ineffectual stint as vizier, had to try to clear up the disastrous mess left when the Qarakhānid Turk Bughrākhān, a recent convert, expelled Nūḥ b. Manṣūr from his own capital. In the end it was indeed the Muslim Turks, the Ghaznavids and Qarakhānids, who destroyed the Sāmānid state. Balʿamī did not have to be a prophet himself to foresee the consequences of the Turkish infiltration of the state: Turkish amirs had wreaked chaos in Iraq for decades by his time, and he must have been able to observe the growing power of converted Turks in the Sāmānid domains.

Balʿamī's treatment of Alexander also reveals the deep differences between his interpretation of the past and the traditional Iranian one. Balʿamī presents Alexander above all as a religious figure, a prophet-like figure who would save the Muslim world at the end of time. His inspiration for this interpretation was of course the Qur'ān, quotations from which figure prominently in his narrative. Islamic elements do feature in Firdawsī's treatment of Alexander but they represent only a fairly minor part of the narrative. Thus while Firdawsī mentions the building of the wall against Gog and Magog, the episode occupies only 54 lines[46] out of nearly two thousand devoted to Alexander.[47] Much of the rest of Firdawsī's narrative is made up of material derived from a Sāsānian

45 Daniel, The Samanid "Translations" of Tabari', [p. 11.], and see the discussion in Chapter 3.
46 Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, M.N.Osmonov (ed.), Moscow: Izdatelʿstvo Vostochnoi Literatury, 1968, VII, pp. 84–7, 11. 1421–1475.
47 Ibid, pp. 6–112.

version of the Alexander romance. This had been Persianized, and presented Alexander as a legitimate Iranian king, a relative of the last Achaemenids.[48] For instance, the *Shāhnāma* has Darius request Alexander marry his daughter in order to produce a son who will preserve the Avesta and the Zoroastrian religion.[49] The aim of this rewriting of history was to ensure that the continuity of Iranian kingship, and thus the legitimacy of the Sāsānian dynasty, was upheld.

Zoroastrians, however, generally had a much more negative view of Alexander, and classed him as one of the great enemies of Iran.[50] The historian Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī (d. after 350/961), who tells us he had access to many Iranian sources such as the *Khwadāy Nāmag*, the Pahlavī Book of Kings, records only Alexander's destruction of the cities of Iran and his killing of the Persian nobility.[51] Although Ḥamza was a Muslim, there is no reference to the Qur'ānic legends of Alexander. Bal'amī thus ignores both possible Iranian perspectives on Alexander, the hostile Zoroastrian one and the positive Sāsānian one transmitted by Firdawsī. Effectively, he rejects both, for his inspiration is the Qur'ān not the *Khwadāy Nāmag*, and his perspective is Islamic, not Iranian. As we shall see, this applies not just to the Alexander episode, but throughout the *Tārīkhnāma*.

## Bahrāin Chūbīn, ancestor of the Sāmānids

The Persian general Bahrām Chūbīn, from whom the Sāmānids claimed descent, overthrew the Sāsānian emperor Hurmuz IV in 590 AD, making him a highly controversial figure in Iranian history. On the one hand he saved Iran from the Turkish khāqān's invasions, but on the other he was a usurper who overthrew his king.[52] His brief rule was ended when Hurmuz's son and heir, Khusraw II Parvīz, returned from exile with Byzantine support and successfully reclaimed the throne.

The Persian dynasties (and sometimes the Turkish ones too) that arose in the wake of the 'Abbāsid collapse often claimed Sāsānian ancestry. The legitimacy of the Ṣaffārids, the Būyids and the Ṭāhirids and others was partly dependent on their ability to find some putative royal forefather. For instance, the Būyids, in reality descended from a Caspian fisherman, sought to bolster their status among the older established Iranian

48 W.L.Hanaway, 'Persian Popular Romances before the Safavid Period', unpublished PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1970, pp. 97–9.

49 Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, VI, p. 402, 11. 367–376. See Hanaway, 'Persian Popular Romances', pp. 86–91 for an analysis of the Persianization of the Alexander romance.

50 Hanaway, 'Persian Popular Romances', p. 94.

51 Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, *Ta'rīkh Sinī Mulūk al-Arḍ*, I.Gottwald (ed.), Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāh, 1961 (?), pp. 38–9.

52 See further K.Czeglédy, 'Bahrām Čōbīn and the Persian apocalyptic literature', *Acta Orient alia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 8(1958), p. 25.

noble families into whom they married by forging a genealogy that linked them to the Sāsanians.[53] As Treadwell argues, 'The political function of these genealogies, which were no doubt seen by percipient observers to be legitimatory charters rather than statements of physical descent, was to provide the necessary credentials for rulers who operated in an Iranian cultural environment.'[54] It is surprising that the Sāmānids should have sought to legitimize themselves by claiming descent from a usurper rather than a true Persian emperor as their contemporaries and rivals did. Treadwell suggests that this may have been in part connected with the dynasty's desire to portray themselves as *ghāzī* defenders of the *umma,* and descent from the great anti-Turkish champion would have resonated on the borders of *Dār al-Islām* where warfare against Turkish infidel was a continuing theme. He also argues the Sāmānids' reluctance to claim imperial descent is reflected in their linking of themselves to a non-royal figure, for 'they chose a figure who was a march-lord, a prince who occupied the same subordinate position vis-a-vis his monarch as the Sāmānids did in relation to the caliph'.[55] Yet it is hard to imagine that the Sāmānids, generally loyal to the ʿAbbāsids from whose investiture of the dynasty as rulers of Transoxiana and Khurāsān they also drew their legitimacy,[56] would have wished for the obvious parallel with a subordinate who overthrew his monarch to be drawn.

Balʿamīʾs discussion of Bahrām Chūbīn's career is (with the possible exception of Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*) the sole treatment of Bahrām's career surviving from Sāmānid times. It should therefore offer a unique view of how the Sāmānids wished their controversial ancestor to be perceived. The account survives in two distinct versions, one longer and one shorter.[57] The longer recension is based on the shorter text, but is much more detailed. Rarely does the additional material affect the outline of the narrative, although it does contain some episodes that are not to be found in the shorter version, such as the account of Bahrām Chūbīn's encounter with a fairy.[58] Presumably the source for this was the book of *Akhbār-i ʿAjam,* which is mentioned in the longer but not the shorter version.[59]

53 W.Madelung, 'The assumption of the title *Shāhānshāh* by the Būyids and the "Reign of the Daylam (Dawlat al-Daylam)"', *JNES* 28/ii(1969), pp. 106–7.
54 W.L.Treadwell, 'Political History of the Sāmānid State', unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1991, pp. 68–9.
55 Ibid, p. 285, n. 66. See here also for references to those authors who record the Sāmānid claim to descent from Bahrām Chūbīn, among them Gardīzī, Ibn al-Athīr, Samʿānī and Ibn Ḥawqal.
56 The Sāmānids nonetheless did have the occasional dispute with the Baghdad caliphate, most notably refusing to recognize al-Muṭīʿ and al-Qādir, substituting their names with those of their predecessors on Sāmānid coinage. See ibid, pp. 288–9.
57 Add 836, ff. 67b–70a (long version, with some abridgements); *Tārīkhnāma,* II, pp. 764–805 (long); Fatih 4285, ff. 140b–143a (short); Aya Sofya 3050 ff. 167a–170b (short).
58 *Tārīkhnāma,* II, pp. 776–781; Add 836, ff. 67b–68a.
59 Ibid, II, p. 764. It is not, however, mentioned in Add 836.

Hurmuz, on the advice of his court, sends his general Bahrām Chūbīn to confront the Turkish khāqān who is invading Iran. Bahrām wins a decisive victory over the Turks and remits the plunder to court, but Hurmuz's vizier Yazdān Bakhshish[60] tells the king that this is only a part of the total gained, suggesting Bahrām is keeping the rest for himself. Hurmuz, furious, insults Bahrām for his ingratitude by sending him a spindle, thread and fetters, implying his fickleness is like a woman's. Bahrām's army, angered by this slight, advances on the capital and Hurmuz is removed from power as a result of his treatment of Bahrām. His son Parvīz accedes, but Bahrām persuades the imperial army confronting him outside the city to support him instead and manages to seize power.[61]

Meanwhile Parvīz flees to safety in Byzantium. He is saved from starvation on his journey by a Bedu named Iyās b. Qabīṣa who feeds him.[62] Later he is helped by a Christian monk who predicts that he will marry the Byzantine emperor's daughter and will return to power with Byzantine aid. He states that he knows from reading 'the books of the prophet Daniel' that Parvīz will be succeeded by his son, and then by his daughter for a few days, then by his grandson, and 'then kingship of the Persians will pass from his hand to the descendants of the prophet Ismā'īl [the Arabs] and will remain with them until the day of resurrection.' Bal'amī concludes by recounting Parvīz's marriage to the emperor's daughter and his triumphant return to Iran which removes Bahrām, forcing him to take exile with the Turks, where he dies.

A comparison of this text with Ṭabarī's versions of the same narrative reveals the scale and purpose of Bal'amī's alterations to the original. Ṭabarī presents us with a picture of Bahrām as usurper, and Khusraw Parvīz as the legitimate claimant to the throne. He gives two separate accounts, although the thrust of both is similar.[63] The first states that the Turks under Shāba invaded Hurmuz's territories, as did the Byzantines, Khazars and Arabs. Hurmuz decides to move against Shāba first, and 'sent against him a man of the people of Rayy called Bahram'.[64] Bahrām advances on the Turkish forces beyond Herāt and Bādhghīs and defeats them, killing Shāba. The latter's son marches against Bahrām, but is forced to surrender. Bahrām then sends Hurmuz plunder from the Turkish camps.

60 The name is slightly corrupt in Add 836 and has therefore been corrected in accordance with the reading of most of the Persian manuscripts.

61 According to the long version, he adopts the Arabic title *al-qayyim bi-'l-mulk* ('Upholder of the Kingdom'), maintaining he is acting as regent for Parvīz's infant son Shahriyār. Add 836, f. 68a; *Tārīkhnāma,* II, p. 790.

62 Long redaction: Iyās states that when Parvīz returns to power he will come and demand repayment (Add 836, f. 68a; Tārīkhnāma, II, p. 792). Iyās b. Qabīṣa is mentioned in Ṭabarī (*Ta'rīkh,* I, pp. 1029, 1038 and ibid, History, V, p. 372, n. 911), not in the account of Bahrām Chūbīn, but rather in a couple of passing mentions to his time as governor of Ḥīra for the Sāsānians between 602 and 610 AD, over a decade after the events described here.

63 Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh,* I, p. 991 ff.

64 Ibid, I, p. 992.

At this point, however, Bahrām rebels. No reason is given except that 'Bahrām was afraid of Hurmuz's violence, as were the troops who were with him.'[65] Bahrām advances on Ctesiphon and proclaims Parvīz king. Parvīz flees to Azerbaijan in fear of his father, and those at court either join him in exile or assist in the deposition of Hurmuz. Having gathered support, Hurmuz returns to Ctesiphon and his army confronts Bahrām's after the general rejects Parvīz's conciliatory offers of promotion. After various battles, Parvīz is obliged to take refuge in Byzantium as his father advises him. From Antioch he writes to Maurice to request help, and the Byzantine emperor gives him his daughter in marriage. At this point the first account concludes by mentioning the length of Hurmuz's reign and stating that Parvīz then 'assumed the royal power'.

This account is somewhat confused and not especially detailed. While at no point is it made clear that Bahrām seized the throne for himself, implying instead that Parvīz inherited the throne directly from Hurmuz, it is undoubtedly hostile to him. Problems of oral transmission amongst Ṭabarī's sources (for whom there is no *isnād* here) may be responsible for some of this lack of clarity, but one cannot escape the conclusion that there is a deliberate attempt to ignore the reasons for Bahrām's rebellion, namely, his shameful treatment by Hurmuz.

The second account is considerably fuller. A description of Parvīz as 'one of the most outstanding kings of that dynasty in regard to bravery, one of them with the most incisive judgment, and one with the most farsighted perceptions'[66] prepares the reader for an account sympathetic to the Sāsānians. The narrative then switches to Parvīz's exile in Azerbaijan, where he receives a letter informing him that the nobles have resolved to depose his father and that Bahrām Chūbīn will occupy Ctesiphon if he does not get there first. Parvīz therefore advances on the capital where the 'leading figures and notables rallied to him, full of joy at his arrival'[67] and assumes the throne. He then goes to Hurmuz, assuring him of his own innocence in his treatment. His father forgives him, but demands that those responsible for his downfall be punished.

On hearing of Parvīz's coronation, Bahrām advances on Ctesiphon. The new emperor, accompanied by nobles, comes out to meet him with great pomp. When Bahrām sees all this splendour, 'he became downcast'.[68] Parvīz offers to promote him to Ispahbād of all Persia, but Bahrām responds with threats and abuse so violent that his own sister rebukes him. Battle commences, and Parvīz is obliged to retreat, fleeing to Byzantium on his father's advice. The courtiers Bisṭām and Bindūya therefore strangle Hurmuz with Parvīz's tacit consent to prevent him being used as a puppet ruler by Bahrām, and then accompany Parvīz into exile, a stratagem of Bindūya's saving the emperor from capture by Bahrām's forces.

Meanwhile, Bahrām seizes the throne despite general hostility, ruling by fear.[69] Bahrām b. Siyāvush, formerly one of Bahrām Chūbīn's generals, conspires to overthrow

65 Ibid, I, p. 993; ibid, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, V: *The Sāsānids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids, and Yemen* (tr. C.Bosworth), Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999, p. 303.
66 Ṭabarī, *History*, V, p. 305.
67 Ibid, V, p. 306.
68 Ibid, V, p. 308.
69 Ibid, V, p. 311.

the usurper, but the plan fails. Parvīz, however, has managed to reach Antioch and contact Maurice for aid. The Byzantine emperor sends him his daughter in marriage and his brother Theodosius with an army sixty thousand strong. They advance to Azerbaijan where they join Bindūya, who has escaped to there, while 'people from Fārs, Iṣbahān, and Khurāsān rushed to Parvīz's standard'.[70] Bahrām advances towards his rival, but according to the Zoroastrians, Parvīz escapes him by the aid of a supernatural power. He then meets Bahrām in single combat and defeats him so that the rebel is obliged to retreat to the Turks, who received him with honour. Parvīz eventually succeeds in having him murdered in exile.

While Ṭabarī's first account is not favourable to Bahrām, this second does not attempt to disguise its utter hostility. Again, no proper explanation is offered of Bahrām's rebellion. Rather, the general is seen as essentially a violent thug, responding to the rightful emperor's offers of promotion and favour with abuse, and ruling through fear alone. Even Bahrām's erstwhile supporters such as Bahrām b. Siyāvush reject his rule in disgust, and when he is finally removed, the people of Iran rejoice at the restoration of their true sovereign.

A different approach to Bahrām Chūbīn is found in Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*. Firdawsī treats his rebellion at length,[71] and uses it to explore the relationship between rulers and their subjects and the legitimacy of these rulers.[72] Firdawsī is sympathetic towards Bahrām, who is depicted as a hero driven to rebellion by the emperor's ill-treatment of him. Parvīz, on the other hand, is portrayed as a weak and ineffective monarch who can only regain his throne with foreign aid. Thus Firdawsī's treatment of Bahrām has more in common with Balʿamī's than either do with Ṭabarī's account. However, Balʿamī's account does not reflect Firdawsī's preoccupation with the question of dynastic legitimacy. In the *Shāhnāma*, Bahrām Chūbīn argues that he has the right to the throne on the basis of his ability, and mocks the Sāsānians' own descent, as Sāsān himself had been a shepherd.[73] The long version of this episode in the *Tārīkhnāma* makes it clear that Bahrām only ever intended to be regent, while the short version is silent on the question of whether Parvīz or Bahrām is more deserving of the throne. Writing for a ruler who claimed descent from Bahrām Chūbīn, it is unsurprising that Balʿamī sought to avoid portraying Manṣūr's ancestor as a usurper.

Thus it is clear that Balʿamī could not have translated Ṭabarī's version as it stands even if he had wanted to. The highly negative portrayal of Bahrām Chūbīn in the *History* would have been unacceptable to the Sāmānids. Yet while Balʿamī does offer some excuse for Bahrām's rebellion in his emphasis on his mistreatment by Hurmuz, and his treatment of the subject is far less openly hostile than Ṭabarī's, Bahrām's career is not especially romanticized. Although Bahrām Chūbīn is listed among Manṣūr's ancestors

70 Ibid, V, p. 313.
71 Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, VIII, p. 337–IX, p. 210.
72 D.Davis, *Epic and Sedition: The Case of Ferdowsi's* Shāhnāmeh, Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1992, pp. 94–6.
73 Ibid, pp. 88–9.

in the introduction to the *Tārīkhnāma*, Balʿamī makes no reference to his connection with the Sāmānid dynasty in this passage, and there is no trace of any attempt to legitimize the dynasty through its links to him. This is quite the contrary of what one would expect of a history composed at the behest of the Sāmānid ruler.

The most credible explanation for Balʿamī's treatment of this subject is that he was not writing for an audience to whom the Sāmānids wished to appeal through their links with the Iranian past. As discussed in Chapter 1, the use of Iranian imagery seems to have been restricted to court circles, so it is unsurprising that the *Tārīkhnāma* should play down links between the Sāmānids and the Iranian past if it was addressed to a wider audience beyond the court, as its preface suggests. Although the Būyids may have needed to stress the Sāsānian heritage to legitimize themselves, they operated in a very different environment from the Sāmānids. Western Iran and the Caspian, where the Būyids were based, remained centres of Iranian culture and Zoroastrianism up to the fourth/tenth century, whereas Transoxiana was part of a very different cultural area where Islam was the dominant element in almost every aspect of life. Furthermore, the Sāmānids were by no means unique in their claim to descent from Bahrām Chūbīn. According to the preface to Abū Manṣūr b. ʿAbd al-Razzāq's *Shāhnāma*, both Ibn ʿAbd al-Razzāq himself and his secretary Abū Manṣūr Maʿmarī could trace their lineage back to Bahrām Chūbīn.[74] There is no record that either of these were either related to one another or to the Sāmānids. Thus it seems unlikely that such genealogies would have been taken particularly seriously by anyone in the fourth/tenth century *mashriq*. Probably, they represent the same Iranianizing tendency among the elite that Manṣūr b. Nūḥ's Pahlavī-inscribed medallion does—one that was restricted to the court and upper classes, and not destined for public consumption. Interestingly, just as Bahrām Chūbīn himself traced his lineage back to the Arsacids and rejected the legitimacy of the Sāsānians,[75] so does Manṣūr's medallion use distinctively east Iranian imagery which does not draw on Sāsānian antecedents. This suggests that in so far as the Sāmānids and their vassals did legitimize themselves by reference to the Iranian past, this was not done through the Sāsānians, but through other, local, connections. However, the fact that Balʿamī ignores the Sāmānids' descent from Bahrām Chūbīn in this passage reflects the fairly limited appeal of this tendency and underlines that while Balʿamī wrote in Persian, he was not necessarily pursuing any obvious patriotic agenda.

74 V.Minorsky, 'The older preface to the *Shāh-nāma*' in *Studi Orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi della Vida*, Rome: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1956, II, pp. 176–8. Abū Manṣūr b. ʿAbd al-Razzāq is said to be descended from Bahrām 'who at the time of Khusraw Parvīz was *ispabad*', who must be identical with Bahrām Chūbīn. Abū Manṣūr Maymarī's genealogy is traced back to the Kanārang (lord of an eastern march), 'son of Parvīz's sarhang'. Here the Kanārang has become confused with his father, but it is clear from the account of his battles against the Turkish king Shāba makes it clear that the reference is indeed to Bahrām Chūbīn.

75 A.Sh. Shahbazi, 'Bahrām VI. Cōbīn' in *EIr*, III, pp. 519–522.

**The *Ridda:* apostasy and the early Islamic state**

Even during the lifetime of the Prophet, Islam had started to expand across the Arabian peninsula. Through a combination of raids, treaties and peaceful submission many of the disparate tribes of Arabia had been obliged to set aside their feuding and unite under the banner of Islam. Yet this victory for Muḥammad's inchoate state was not purely religious, for the newly converted tribes had to remit tribute and tax to Medina, marking their political subjugation to the new hegemony of Quraysh, the Prophet's tribe. On Muḥammad's death every tribe but Quraysh rebelled. Some sought to assert their independence by discontinuing payments though still adhering to the new faith, while others, incited by the false prophets who, if the chronicles are to be believed, were rife in Arabia at this point, rejected Islam entirely. Muslim historians named these movements, of whichever variety, the *Ridda* or 'Apostasy'. It was a crucial moment for the young Medinan state: had Abū Bakr, the first Caliph, failed to suppress the *Ridda* it is likely that Muḥammad's name would now be no more famous than that of Musaylima, the anti-prophet of al-Yamāma, if indeed Islam had succeeded in surviving to record its own history. Although Muslim historians viewed Islam's ultimate victory as inevitable, the story of Abū Bakr's uncompromising reaction and the defeat of the apostate Arabian tribes by his commanders, most prominently the famous Khālid b. al-Walīd, occupies a prominent place in Ṭabarī, who based his narrative predominantly on accounts transmitted by Sayf b. 'Umar, a somewhat controversial *akhbārī*.[76] The theme of *Ridda* derived its importance for Islamic historiography from the fact that it was, like the related theme *futūḥ* (the conquest of new lands), 'seen retrospectively as a sign of God's favour for the new Islamic faith'.[77]

Bal'amī's treatment of the *Ridda* is of particular interest to us. If the *Tārīkhnāma* was inspired partly by a need to respond to heretical movements, especially to the Ismā'īlī propaganda which sought to convert the Sunnīs of Transoxiana, we may well expect to find this reflected here. As numerous tracts of the mediaeval period make clear, conversion to Ismā'īlism was often seen as no better than apostasy itself. Indeed, there was a tendency among some mediaeval Muslims to condemn virtually any theological position with which one did not agree, as is witnessed by the *al-Sawād al-A'ẓam*'s branding of Mu'tazilism as *kufr* (unbelief).[78] The failure of the mass apostasy of the 630s should therefore offer excellent parallels for a writer determined to combat heresy in the admittedly different atmosphere of the fourth/tenth century, whether of an Ismā'īlī or any other variety. As Lewis has noted, the *Ridda* 'provided the model or paradigm for the treatment of rulers or entities seen as apostate'.[79] The extent to which the text may in fact be seen as reflecting such concerns will be assessed in the following discussion.

76 On Sayf see E.Landau-Tasseron, 'Sayf Ibn 'Umar in medieval and modern scholarship', *Der Islam* 67(1990), esp. pp. 1–12.

77 Ṭabarī, *History*, X, p. xiii.

78 Samarqandī, *Tarjuma-i al-Sawād al-A'ẓam* ('A. Ḥabībī), Tehran: Bunyād-i Farhang-i Iran, 1348, p. 36. This tendency was, however, condemned by many theologians.

79 B.Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 85.

**The rebellion of Aswad the Liar**

Balʿamī's first chapter devoted to the *Ridda* is entitled the Account of Aswad the Liar and his Killing in Yemen.[80] Only part of the chapter in Add 836 is concerned with Aswad and his rebellion, with the latter half treating Abū Bakr's efforts to defend Medina and gain the upper hand over the apostate tribes, a matter given a separate chapter heading in the Persian manuscripts consulted. In between the two sections is a very brief notice of the death of Fāṭima, the Prophet's daughter. In this arrangement Balʿamī emulates Ṭabarī.[81] In the discussion I will focus on Aswad's revolt.

Aswad, of the tribe of ʿAns, and also known to Ṭabarī as ʿAyhala or ʿAbhala, raised the standard of revolt in Yemen at the end of Muḥammad's life or just after his death. While Balʿamī alludes to his claim to prophethood,[82] we are given virtually no detail on this. Ṭabarī does not go any further than calling him a *kāhin* (soothsayer),[83] who is in league with supernatural powers, as is illustrated when Satan warns him of the Muslim conspiracy to murder him.[84] Both Balʿamī and Ṭabarī concentrate their accounts on how the loyal Muslims of Yemen unite against the usurper who had killed Muḥammad's appointee, and how Islam is successfully restored to the country.

The most obvious differences between Balʿamī's and Ṭabarī's accounts are in structure rather than fact, for there is no evidence that Balʿamī relied on any external sources in his treatment of Aswad. Ṭabarī's narrative is given in three principle versions, all transmitted through Sayf, and all purporting to be first-hand accounts. As so often with Sayf, the accounts are exceedingly confusing with unexpected changes of grammatical persons rendering even more severe the difficulties presented by Sayf's (or his informants') unorthodox grammar and vocabulary. Balʿamī smoothed over these difficulties, combining elements of the various accounts, and essentially created a new narrative based on Ṭabarī.[85]

While Balʿamī does not explicitly contradict Ṭabarī to any great extent in his treatment of Aswad's rebellion, his account does omit some facts stressed by Ṭabarī. Most intriguingly, Ṭabarī's emphasis on the role of Persians in

80 Add 836, ff. 126a–127b; *Tārīkhnāma*, III, pp. 352–357; Fatih 4285, ff. 225b-226b; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 230b–231b. The text of the *Ridda* narratives in all these manuscripts is extremely stable, with very few variants, and no differences of any significance.

81 This material is covered by Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, I, pp. 1851–81, in which the account of events in Yemen concludes on p. 1868. See also, *Tārīkhnāma*, III, p. 357; Fatih 4285, f. 226b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 231b.

82 Add 836, f. 126a; *Tārīkhnāma*, III, p. 352; Fatih 4285, f. 225b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 230b.

83 Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, I, p. 1864.

84 Ibid, I, p. 1857, p. 1859, p. 1867.

85 A discussion of this characteristic of the *Tārīkhnāma* is found in below in Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī: The politics of tragedy'. See also Chapter 3.

opposing Aswad is greatly reduced by Balʿamī. In both works, Persians play a prominent and positive role, but their ethnicity is highlighted only by Ṭabarī.[86] As both historians record, Muḥammad had appointed the Persian Bādhān governor of all Yemen on his conversion to Islam.[87] After Bādhān's death, his son Shahr had been appointed over Ṣanʿā' while the rest of the country was divided up between Muslim Arab chieftains. After Aswad's victory and the consequent death of Shahr b. Bādhān, two more Persians, Ibn Bādhān's cousins Fayrūz[88] and Zādūya, come to prominence. Initially Aswad had appointed them as commanders of the Persians in Yemen, but Muʿādh b. Jabal (who appears to have been a missionary sent by the Prophet to Yemen) swiftly persuades them to join forces with him to overthrow the pretender. Fayrūz and Zādūya seek the assistance of Aswad's wife (formerly Shahr's wife, and a Persian herself, whose name is given by Ṭabarī as the Persian Āzād). Hating her new husband who, she says, is 'an infidel who does not pray…nor does he avoid what is forbidden',[89] she readily agrees to help, and through her Fayrūz is able to penetrate into Aswad's house and kill him. Fayrūz presents the head to his fellow conspirators, who the next day show it to the people in the main mosque of Ṣanʿā', and Islam is restored to Yemen.

One might imagine that this episode would present a superb opportunity for Balʿamī, writing at the behest of a dynasty known both for its sponsorship of Persian culture and for its religious orthodoxy, especially if a principal motive for the *Tārīkhnāma's* composition was indeed the desire to combat heresy. The episode of Aswad shows some of the earliest Persian Muslims overthrowing a pagan usurper in order to restore the true faith, a theme which, if developed, could have had tremendous resonance in the fourth/tenth century. The similarities between the Sāmānids' and Fayrūz and Zādūya's struggle against false belief are obvious. Yet this aspect is entirely ignored by Balʿamī. Scarcely any reference is made by Balʿamī to the Persians' ethnicity, although admittedly it would have been as obvious from their names to his audience as it is to us. No crude parallels with any contemporary situation are drawn, and indeed, Balʿamī's use of Ṭabarī's accounts occasionally suggests that he was deliberately avoiding any such comparisons.

86 Persians had long been resident in Yemen owing to that land's subjugation to the Sāsānian Empire. See R.Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs from the Bronze Age to the coming of Islam*, London: Routledge, 2001, pp. 56–7 on this relationship between Yemen and Iran in Late Antiquity.

87 Add 836, f. 126a; *Tārīkhnāma*, III, p. 353; Fatih 4285, f. 225b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 230b; Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, I, p. 1851. Note that Balʿamī (in Add 836 and the Persian manuscripts) uses the correct Persian form of the name Bādhān, whereas Ṭabarī has Bādhām.

88 Given in RAS Persian 22 and Fatih 2485 as Shahr-i Fīrūz, but in Aya Sofya 3050, as Pīrūz/Fīrūz.

89 Add 836, f. 126b; *Tārīkhnāma*, III, pp. 353–354; Fatih 4285, f. 226a; Aya Sofya 3050, 231a.

In Ṭabarī's second[90] account Fayrūz is credited with giving the first call to prayer after Aswad's murder, a fact which obviously heightens the Persian's religious role. Yet Balʿamī chooses an account to which Ṭabarī gives very little prominence, stating that the Arab Muʿādh b. Jabal gave the first call to prayer.[91] Ṭabarī also occasionally refers to the Persians' ethnic origin, such as by giving Zādūya the epithet 'al-Fārisī'('the Persian').[92] This is avoided by Balʿamī. He also entirely ignores one particularly laudatory comment on Fayrūz, given in an *isnād* traced back through Sayf to Ibn ʿUmar:

> The news [of the Muslims' victory] reached the Prophet from heaven on the night in which [Aswad] al-ʿAnsī was killed, that he might bring us the good tidings, so he said, Al-ʿAnsī was killed last night, a blessed man of a blessed family killed him.' He was asked, 'And who [is this]?' He replied, 'Fayrūz gained the victory, Fayrūz.'[93]

This reduction of the Persians' importance is reflected in the Persian manuscripts too, so it cannot be suggested that it is the result of an anti-Persian bias in the Arabic Add 836. It is of course true that Balʿamī's account is much shorter than Ṭabarī's and thus is obliged to jettison some material in the Arabic original. It is quite possible that Balʿamī did not have a deliberate policy of playing down the Persians' role, but rather that he did not find their Persian ethnicity nearly as interesting as one might have anticipated. This is in itself significant, and together with the evidence I have presented earlier, such as Balʿamī's discussion of Ishmael, suggests that it is unlikely that Balʿamī was attempting to promote a Perso-centric, nationalistic agenda as previous scholars have suggested.

90 Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, I, p. 1862. Here the narrator is unclear due to the changes in personal pronouns but it must be either Fayrūz or Zādūya. It cannot be Qays, mentioned as the third conspirator, as the narrator indicates he has close kinship with Āzād and therefore must be Persian. The context indicates Fayrūz is more likely.

91 Ibid, I, p. 1863. Cf. Add 836, f. 126a; *Tārīkhnāma*, III, p. 357; Fatih 4285, f. 226a-b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 231b. Ṭabarī does not even state unambiguously that Muʿādh took the first call to prayer; indeed as he records that Muʿādh had to be summoned to come to Ṣanʿāʾ after Aswad's defeat, it is highly unlikely that he could have done so. Balʿamī has thus taken some liberties with the text to produce the curious result we observe. Strangely, he ignores Ṭabarī's third account which states that the Prophet's envoy Wabr b. Yuḥannis performed the first *adhān*, which would have allowed him to avoid attributing it to Fayrūz, if this was his aim. See Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, I, p. 1867.

92 Ibid, I, p. 1864.

93 Ṭabarī, *History*, X, pp. 33–4; *Taʾrīkh*, I, p. 1863.

## Sajāḥ the Prophetess and the Apostasy of Tamīm

Balʿamī seems to have been descended from the tribe of Tamīm, at least if we can trust the testimony of the mediaeval biographers and historians, which there seems no reason not to do in this instance, it being unanimous on the subject.[94] Tamīm, Ṭabarī and other historians of the *Ridda* such as Diyārbakrī and Balansī indicate, were significant players in the *Ridda* period and are one of the most prominent apostate tribes they discuss. Ṭabarī devotes a considerable part of his narrative to Tamīm's entanglement with the false prophetess Sajāḥ from which the tribe does not emerge in a very positive light. The author of the Arabic *History*, being of Āmulī Persian descent, obvious has no axe to grind in his discussion of the individual Arab tribes other than the predictable general dislike of apostasy. The same is not necessarily true of Balʿamī, who proves many times elsewhere more than capable of ignoring or rewriting events, however well known, that do not suit his purposes, whatever they may be. Nothing would be more natural than that Balʿamī should obfuscate his Tamīmī ancestors' part in events, especially if his motive was indeed to combat heresy and apostasy in Sāmānid Transoxiana.

Tamīm's apostasy started, according to Ṭabarī, with the reluctance of some of the *ʿummāl* (sing. *ʿāmil*) or tax collectors appointed by Muḥammad himself to remit to Mecca the *ṣadaqa*, then a compulsory tax.[95] Each clan had its own *ʿāmil* and while some remained loyal, others returned the *ṣadaqa* to their tribes, most famously Mālik b. Nuwayra of Banū Yarbūʿ whose activities earned him the nickname 'al-Jafūl (the Refunder)'.[96] This appears to have led to fierce dissent among the clans of Tamīm, although there is no suggestion as yet that they had abandoned Islam itself. However, the prophetess Sajāḥ[97] bt. al-Ḥārith of the Mesopotamian tribe of Taghlib took advantage of Tamīm's infighting to intervene, and formed an alliance with Mālik b. Nuwayra against his Tamīmī opponents. After a battle between Mālik, his Tamīmī allies such as Wakīʿ of the Banū Mālik, and Sajāḥ's Taghlibid forces on one side and on the other Tamīmī clans led by the Banū 'l-Ribāb, Sajāḥ proceeds to the province of al-Yamāma, the domain of the false prophet Musaylima with whom she allies herself and even marries.[98] Eventually, inevitably, the great Muslim general Khālid b. al-Walīd brings

94 However, the *nisba* 'Tamīmī' that the sources give Abū 'Alī and his father could indicate he was linked to Tamīm through ties of clientage rather than descent. The difference is not particularly significant for our discussion: the main point is that he was closely linked to Tamīm.

95 Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, I, pp. 1908–10.

96 See Ṭabarī, *History*, X, p. 90, n. 595.

97 Add 836 occasionally records her name as Sajāḥa.

98 Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, I, pp. 1911–19.

99 Add 836, ff. 128b-129a. In *Tārīkhnāma*, III, p. 376; Fatih 4285, f. 230a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 235b: 'She was a Christian, and an eloquent woman, and gave very fine speeches in saj', and told people, "I am a prophet and inspiration comes to me from God."'

about the downfall of both, and Islam prevails. Ṭabarī does not mention the substance of Sajāḥ's beliefs, and Balʿamī merely states that 'she was a Christian who claimed to be a prophetess.'[99]

Ṭabarī's account is reliant on Sayf and is thus often hard to interpret. Quite apart from the linguistic difficulties, the audience requires a sound knowledge of tribal politics, as the text is replete with a confusing mélange of the names of various Tamīmī clans or allied tribes. Balʿamī clearly did not anticipate that his audience would have such skills, and his account is considerably clearer than Sayf's. This clarity does not, however, redound to the credit of his ancestors' tribe, for where Ṭabarī/Sayf list obscure clan names while scarcely referring to Tamīm itself, Balʿamī's simplification highlights the tribe's complicity in the apostasy. Indeed Balʿamī often seems to strive to redress Sayf's well-known bias towards Tamīm, which was the traditionist's tribe also. As Donner notes on comparing Ṭabarī's account of this episode to that of Balansī, another early authority for the *Ridda,* ʿal- Ṭabarī's narratives, derived from Sayf b. 'Umar, read like an effort to divert the reader's attention away from the questionable behavior of Mālik b. Nuwayra',[100] and this may be partly a result of Sayf's aim to exculpate Tamīm. Thus in his efforts to correct this bias, when Mālik and his brother agree to an alliance with Balʿamī Sajāḥ, notes that they are chiefs of Tamīm and friends of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb,[101] facts ignored by Ṭabarī which serve only to magnify their crime. After the rebel forces' victory over the Banū 'l-Balʿamī Ribāb, writes that 'all the clans of Tamīm believed in her [Sajāḥ][102] something Ṭabarī does not record. Furthermore, Balʿamī devotes considerable attention to Sajāḥ's encounter with Musaylima,[103] with its atmosphere of debauchery and hypocrisy. Musaylima's and Sajāḥ's *sajʿ* utterances (discussed previously in Chapter 3) are quoted by Ṭabarī without comment, whereas in the *Tārīkhnāma* the false prophets usually preface them with the phrase such as 'God sent down to me a *sūra* on this, which is…'.[104] By drawing the attention to their efforts to emulate Muḥammad's genuinely inspired utterances, Balʿamī underlines the gravity of their heresy.

There is therefore no evidence to suggest Balʿamī felt the slightest concern about his ancestors' association with this apostate tribe. Compared to Ṭabarī/Sayf, Balʿamī actually highlights Tamīm's involvement, demonstrating of what little concern this was to him. It also suggests that the desire to combat heresy may not have been at the forefront of his mind, for an author with that intention would surely not emphasize his

100 Ṭabarī, *History,* X, p. xv.
101 Add 836, f. 129a; *Tārīkhnāma,* III, p. 373; Fatih 4285, f. 230a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 235b.
102 Add 836, f. 129a. The Persian text lists the clans: *Tārīkhnāma,* III, p. 378; Fatih 4285, f. 230b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 236a.
103 Add 836, f. 129a-b; *Tārīkhnāma,* III, pp. 380–383; Fatih 4285; f. 231a-b Aya Sofya 3050, f. 237a–b.
104 Add 836, f. 129b; *Tārīkhnāma,* III, p. 381; Fatih 4285, f. 231a-b; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 236b237a.

own ancestors' apostasy. In Balʿamī, Tamīm are shown as wholly lacking any good grace even on their final conversion back to Islam: the Tamīmī chiefs Zibriqān b. Badr and Aqraʿ b. Ḥābis, the very ones who had accompanied Sajāḥ to al-Yamāma, on realizing they have made a major miscalculation, approach Abū Bakr demanding the *kharāj* of Baḥrayn in return for guaranteeing the future orthodoxy of their tribe.[105] Mālik meanwhile dies at the hands of one of Khālid's soldiers, although it was debated as to whether he had converted or not.[106] Of course, the entire account is hostile to the apostates, as is underlined by the sordid nature of Musaylima and Sajāḥ's relationship, and Musaylima's invention of *'sūras'* to justify fulfilling his desires.

Yet this does not imply that the account was meant to have any particular obvious contemporary relevance, for virtually any author of any dogmatic allegiance would have condemned apostasy and represented it in the worst possible light. The intriguing question is why Balʿamī seeks to correct Sayf's pro-Tamīmī bias which Ṭabarī reflects when it may have been potentially embarrassing to do so. Even granted that the misdeeds of Balʿamī's Tamimi forefathers may not have been a source of any embarrassment in the environment of fourth/tenth century Transoxiana, Balʿamī nonetheless, without any apparent necessity, rejected the cover-up of their activities that the text conveniently presented him and deliberately emphasized them.

## Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī: the politics of tragedy

The opposition which so frequently confronted the Umayyad state often took on a religious character. Sometimes, as with Abū Muslim's revolt which propelled the ʿAbbāsids to power, religious concerns were at least to some extent a mask for economic and social grievances. Yet the attempt to trace the roots of all opposition to the Umayyads in such complaints is mistaken, for Muslim opinion appears to have been genuinely shocked by many of their actions. Two courses of action were open to those who opposed the Umayyad state and its frequently drunken, irreligious caliphs. Safest was to emulate the many piety-minded individuals such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Ḥasan b. ʿAlī who withdrew entirely from political life, accepting the *status quo* without approving of it. The alternative was open revolt. Of such rebellions, the most successful was based in Mecca, under the anti-caliph ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zubayr. The latter had refused to recognize the succession of Muʿāwiya's son Yazīd in 60/680 and during a time of great Umayyad weakness succeeded in securing the allegiance of most of the lands of the caliphate except

105 Add 836, f. 130a; *Tārīkhnāma*, III, pp. 383–4; Fatih 4285, f. 232a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 237b; Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, I, p. 1920. Their demand was rejected.

106 Add 836, f. 130a–b; *Tārīkhnāma*, III, pp. 385–389; Fatih 4285, ff. 232a-233b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 238a-b; Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, I, pp. 1924–5.

parts of Syria. Yet while the inspiration for Ibn al-Zubayr's transient caliphate seems to have originated mainly in the widespread disgust at the Umayyads, for he bore no closer relationship to Muḥammad than they, most revolts were either Khārijite or Shīʿite in character, and attracted wildly fluctuating levels of popular support. Syria, the Umayyad power-base since Muʿāwiya's governorship, generally remained loyal, while Iraq was a centre of dissent.

The most significant of these rebellions was also the most pathetic. In 61/ 680 the grandson of the Prophet, Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī, marched on Iraq accompanied by his family and a handful of followers. His cousin Muslim b. ʿAqīl had already gone to Kūfa, whence he had written to Ḥusayn inviting him to join him there, as he had been told there was substantial support for him in preference to Yazīd. By the time Ḥusayn arrived, the Shīʿite movement in Kūfa had been crushed by the Umayyads' ruthless governor ʿUbaydallāh b.Ziyād who now prepared to kill the Prophet's own grandson. Hunted down by the Umayyad troops under ʿUmar b. Saʿd to Karbalā' on the Euphrates, Ḥusayn and his followers were massacred and his womenfolk taken captive. ʿUbaydallāh then sent Ḥusayn's head along with the prisoners to Yazīd in Damascus.

The tragedy of Ḥusayn has been engraved on the Muslim consciousness ever since. It became a defining event for the Shīʿites who mark the anniversary of the massacre, 10 Muḥarram or 'Āshūrā', to this day.[107] Sympathy for Ḥusayn was by no means limited to those who identified with the ʿAlid cause, and in mediaeval times Sunnīs too sometimes seem to have commemorated 'Āshūrā'.[108] Although the basic facts are undisputed among Muslims, the interpretations of them vary to an extraordinary degree. For instance, some accounts claim that the deaths were caused by ʿUbaydallāh exceeding his orders and that Yazīd genuinely regretted them. Others state that Yazīd rejoiced in the death of his rival. Ṭabarī as ever appears to offer 'a definitive account of the event where all the evidence has been collated and presented',[109] based mainly on the second/eighth century accounts of Abū Mikhnāf and the briefer ones attributed to the Fifth Shīʿite Imām Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad al-Bāqir. However, as Howard argues, Ṭabarī edits the accounts with extreme care, and his version is not all it initially seems.[110] For example, information which would weaken Yazīd's claim to caliphate is omitted and responsibility for the appointment of ʿUbaydallāh is removed from Yazīd. Ṭabarī does not so much distort facts as select them with a specific agenda in mind.

107 The distinction between the Sunnīs and the Shīʿa was of course by no means as clear in the first/seventh century as it was to become by the fourth/tenth.

108 M.Shams al-Dīn, *The Rising of al-Ḥusayn: its impact on the consciousness of Muslim society* (tr. I.Howard), London: Muhammadi Trust, 1985, p. 10, n. 12.

109 Ṭabarī, *The History al-Ṭabarī*, XIX: *The Caliphate of Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya* (tr. I.Howard), Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990, p. ix.

110 Ibid, pp. x–xv.

His general attitude appears to be what one would expect of a Sunnī of his times: while appalled by the murder of the Prophet's grandson, he is prepared to exculpate Yazīd to at least some extent. This would seem to be an attractive presentation for Balʿamī to adopt, yet his treatment of the episode in fact raises serious problems.

Balʿamī selects and combines the accounts of Ṭabarī's various authorities. As we have noted in our discussions of other parts of the *Tārīkhnāma*, this is his standard practice. Information is woven together from disparate authorities regardless of their alleged political or sectarian prejudices, so it is not surprising to find the same technique employed here. Yet there is one perplexing discrepancy in his treatment of the tragedy of Ḥusayn: Balʿamī exhibits a decided preference for information from Shīʿite authorities, despite the fact they only represent a fraction of Ṭabarī's text.

A further and most serious problem is that of the state of the text, which is in places extremely unstable. A particularly interesting and problematic feature is that while much of the text of the Ilkhānid manuscripts considered here—RAS, Persian 22, Fatih 4285 and Aya Sofya 3050—shows relatively little variation between each other until the sections dealing with the aftermath of Ḥusayn's death, they often disagree with Add 836 to a much greater extent than usual. However, the readings of Add 836 are often supported by a somewhat unexpected source, the sixth/twelfth century Mengücekid manuscript from Erzincan, now held in Mashhad as Āstān-i Quds 129, a fragmentary but ancient manuscript. The agreement of Add 836 and the Mashhad manuscript against the Ilkhānid manuscripts is extremely significant. Firstly, the antiquity of the Mashhad manuscript helps confirm that Add 836 preserves a text rather older than that of other manuscripts; it also indicates that the text they share, with its evident ʿAlid sympathies, was later modified and made less controversial, probably for a Mongol audience.

Let us examine firstly Balʿamī's account of Ḥusayn's cousin Muslim's abortive revolt at Kūfa.[111] All the sources concur that the Kūfans wrote to Ḥusayn inviting him to come to them, and he sent Muslim b. ʿAqīl to sound out the situation. Balʿamī states that Muslim encouraged him to come, assuring him that 12,000 Shīʿites had already promised their allegiance,[112] while another 100,000 could be counted on upon his arrival in person.[113] These figures are absent from Ṭabarī, who starts his account with the brief version of Muḥammad al-Bāqir, as transmitted by ʿAmmār al-Duhnī, a well-known Shīʿite traditionist.[114] This is followed by various versions on the authority

111 Add 836, ff. 191b–192b; *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī: ḥavādith-i sālhāyi 15 tā 132 hijrī*, M.Minuvī (ed.), Tehran: Bunyād-i Farhang-i Iran, 1345 (facsimile of Mashhad Āstān-i Quds 129), pp. 251–7; *Tārīkhnāma*, IV, pp. 698–702; Fatih 4285, f. 287a–b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 303a–b; Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, pp. 227–272.

112 *Tārīkhnāma*, IV, p. 699; Fatih 4285, f. 287a; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 202b.

113 This figure of 100, 000 is found only in Add 836 and the Mashhad manuscript.

114 See Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, p. 17, n. 79 for references for accusations of Shīʿism against ʿAmmār. His account is in Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, pp. 227–232.

of Abū Mikhnāf who, in Ṭabarī's words, 'gives a fuller and more complete account'.[115] Abū Mikhnāf had a variety of informants, so a few of his *isnāds* are also traced back to Shī'ite sources. Thus his second *khabar* is reported from Muḥammad b. Bishr al-Hamdānī, another Kūfan Shī'ite.[116] Ṭabarī also inserts into Abū Mikhnāf's account some reports transmitted by 'Umar b. Shabba, another allegedly pro-Shī'ite historian.[117] However, as Howard indicates, it is Muḥammad al-Bāqir's account which is presented as the authentic Shī'ite viewpoint.[118]

At first glance, Bal'amī's account resembles most closely that of Muḥammad al-Bāqir. This is in part a result of their similar style of presentation, for while Abū Mikhnāf constantly cites different authorities, the Fifth Imām's version is smooth and fluent in the same way that Bal'amī's is. However, the similarity is more than superficial, for Bal'amī often prefers Muḥammad al-Bāqir's account to the other sources. There is no substantial issue connected with the rising at Kūfa about which Bal'amī differs with Muḥammad al-Bāqir, although he often uses the other authorities to complement the Imām's rather bare account. Thus the latter states of 'Ubaydallāh's appointment as governor of Baṣra that Yazīd 'gave him authority over Kūfa together with Baṣra. He also wrote to him to hunt for Muslim b. 'Aqīl and kill him if he found him.'[119] Abū Mikhnāf, however, gives a much fuller account of his appointment and the situation in Baṣra, from which Bal'amī takes the detail that 'Ubaydallāh executed Ḥusayn's messenger who was seeking the allegiance of the Baṣrans before his departure. This messenger was executed in Baṣra's congregational mosque as a warning to the people.[120] Likewise, Muḥammad al-Bāqir makes virtually no allusion to 'Ubaydallāh's secretive arrival in Kūfa. Bal'amī follows 'Umar b. Shabba who explains that the governor had left his retinue at Qādisiyya.[121]

In Bal'amī's account of Muslim's rising, of the major pieces of information which cannot be attributed to Muḥammad al-Bāqir, we find that Abū Mikhnāf is the sole authority for only one. 'Umar b. Shabba meanwhile is the sole

115 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, p. 22.
116 See ibid, p. 23, esp. n. 104.
117 Ibid, p. 35, n. 163.
118 Ibid, p. xi.
119 Ibid, p. 18.
120 Add 836, f. 191b; in Mashhad, RAS Persian 22, Fatih 4285, f. 287b and Aya Sofya 3050, f. 303a, no mention of mosque; Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, p. 241.
121 Add 836, f. 192a; Fatih 4285, f. 287b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 303a; *Ta'rīkh*, Ṭabarī, II, p. 243.

authority for three major pieces of information.[122] In addition, there is some other material, such as the number of allegiances promised to Ḥusayn, which does not appear to have any authority other than Balʿamī.[123] Yet whether or not the source for these could be identified, it is clear that Balʿamī's account is overwhelmingly reliant on Muḥammad al-Bāqir and ʿUmar b. Shabba, both Shīʿites. It is also entirely clear that he does not use them innocently to provide information absent elsewhere, for he ignores most of the additional material supplied by Abū Mikhnāf.[124] Furthermore, Muḥammad al-Bāqir's account is by far the least detailed, and ʿUmar's traditions account for a very limited amount of text as well. If Balʿamī had wanted simply to create a comprehensive, authoritative account, this would have been a strange place from which to start.

It is extremely hard to judge from this episode exactly what Balʿamī's intention in using these Shīʿite sources is. A very similar patter exists for his account of Ḥusayn's actual defeat at Karbalā', Muḥammad al-Bāqir's account of which is again exceptionally cursory,[125] obliging Balʿamī to resort to Ṭabarī's other authorities. Again, his selection is somewhat surprising: Ḥumayd b. Muslim al-Azdī is used extensively, although he was reportedly a Shīʿite who supported those who demanded vengeance for Ḥusayn.[126]

122 The other two pieces of information, in addition to that already cited, are: that on ʿUbaydallāh's arrival, the previous governor Nuʿmān b. Bashīr thought he was Ḥusayn and pleaded with him to withdraw in peace (Add 836, f. 192a; *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, p. 254; *Tārīkhnāma*, IV, p. 701; Fatih 4285, f. 287b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 303b; Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, p. 243); and that when ʿUbaydallāh addressed Hānīʾ, the shelterer of Muslim, he reminded him how under his father Ziyād b. Abīhi all the other Shīʿa of Kūfa had been killed (Add 836, loc. cit; *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, p. 255; RAS Persian 22, n/a; Fatih 4285, n/a; Aya Sofya 3050, n/a; Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, p. 246).

123 Aya Sofya 3050, f. 202b. Among the examples of other important pieces of information unique to Balʿamī is his statement that after the arrest of Hānīʾ and Muslim, 10,000 Shīʿites came onto the streets in protest (Add 836, f. 192b; *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, p. 257; other Persian manuscripts: fifty thousand: *Tārīkhnāma*, IV, p. 702; Fatih 4285, f. 287b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 303b).

124 Thus, for instance, Abū Mikhnāf's account of ʿUbaydallāh's assault on Hānīʾ (*Taʾrīkh*, II, pp. 252–3) is ignored by Balʿamī.

125 Add 836, ff. 192b–198a; *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, pp. 257–265; *Tārīkhnāma*, IV, pp. 703–712; Fatih 4285, ff. 287b–294b; Aya Sofya 3050, ff. 303b–306a; Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, pp. 281–3.

126 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, p. 107, n. 369. Balʿamī refers to Ḥumayd at the following points: when ʿUbaydallāh orders that Ḥusayn should be made to die of thirst (Add 836, f. 194a, which is the only manuscript considered here to state that this was deliberately to emulate ʿUthmān's death by thirst; in *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, p. 262; *Tārīkhnāma*, IV, p. 705; Fatih 4285, f. 288b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 204b, no mention ʿUthmān; Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, pp. 311–2); the account of Qāsim b. Ḥasan's death at the hands of ʿAmr b. Saʿīd al-Azdī (Add 836, f. 196a; in *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, the latter's name given as ʿAmr b. (?) Nufayl al-Azdī; *Tārīkhnāma*, IV, pp. 709–710 name of ʿAlī's son given as Qāsim b.

Balʿamī also inserts several passages which have no direct parallels in Ṭabarī, among them some poetry which will be discussed below, and a speech delivered by Ḥusayn just before the battle in which he blames the Kūfans for having betrayed him, and compares himself to Moses confronted by Pharaoh, the archetypical tyrant of Islamic literature.[127]

The passages covering the aftermath of Ḥusayn's death are particularly unstable in the texts, although all agree that Ḥusayn's head was sent to ʿUbaydallāh who forwarded it to Yazīd in Damascus. In Add 836, Yazīd's reaction is recounted as follows, in an account based on Ṭabarī's Sunnī informant Ibn Rawḥ:

> Yazīd, may God curse him, was delighted by news of the victory, but said on account of the people, 'Who ordered you to kill Ḥusayn? I ordered you to take the oath of allegiance from him or to send him to me. If you did this out of obedience to me, I would have been content with your obedience without killing al-Ḥusayn. May God's curse be upon Ibn Sumayya [ʿUbaydallāh].[128] If I had won the victory over al-Ḥusayn, I would not have killed him, nor would I have taken his children captive.[129]

Yazīd continues to pretend to abuse ʿUbaydallāh, and after his speech Balʿamī adds, 'The ulema said there has never been a debauchee more shameless than Yazīd in all the world.'[130] Yazīd's actions contrast with his words, for

Muḥammad, ʿAmr not named; Fatih 4285, name given as Qāsim b. ʿAlī; ʿAmr not named; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 305a: Qāsim b. Ḥusayn; ʿAmr not named; *Taʾrīkh*, II, pp. 358–9); Ḥusayn's death by Sinān b.Anas' spear (Add 836, loc. cit.; *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, p. 267; however, in *Tārīkhnāma*, IV, p. 711, Fatih 4285, f. 289b and Aya Sofya 3050, f. 305b: at hands of Zurʿa, who is named in the Mashhad manuscript as Ḥusayn's penultimate assailant; *Taʾrīkh*, II, p. 366); Zayd b. Arqam's criticism of ʿUbaydallāh (Add 836, f. 197a; *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, p. 273; RAS Persian 22, n/a; Fatih 4285, n/a; Aya Sofya 3050, n/a; *Taʾrīkh*, II, p. 370). Admittedly Ḥumayd is the sole authority for most of these, but it is significant that Balʿamī should have included them anyway.

127 Add 836, f. 195a; *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, p. 264; *Tārīkhnāma*, IV, pp. 706–7; Fatih 4285, f. 288b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 304b.

128 ʿUbaydallāh is occasionally referred to in a derogatory way as Ibn Sumayya or Ibn Marjāna, a reference to his father Ziyād's descent from a prostitute.

129 Add 836, f. 197a-b; *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, p. 273; RAS Persian 22, n/a; Aya Sofya 3050, n/a; in Fatih 4285, f. 290b similar words (in Arabic) are addressed to Zaynab and her children: 'May God curse Ibn Marjāna [ʿUbaydallāh]. If there had been a relationship or blood-link between him and you, he would not have done this to you and would not have sent you in this state.'

130 Add 836, f. 197b; the text differs only slightly in the Mashhad manuscript: 'it must be known that there has never been anyone more shameless and less merciful than Yazīd in the world' (*Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, p. 273); RAS Persian 22, n/a; Fatih 4285, n/a; Aya Sofya 3050, n/a.

he summons the notables of Damascus to his majlis to inspect Ḥusayn's head and the prisoners.

The texts given in the Persian manuscripts under consideration vary, although their treatment remains broadly similar. In Fatih 4285 and RAS Persian 22, Yazīd addresses similar criticism of ʿUbaydallāh to Ḥusayn's family who have been brought to him. Again, Yazīd's seemingly sympathetic attitude is undermined by the text, for in these manuscripts his speech to them is preceded by some verses which he recites, which explain the killing of Ḥusayn as revenge for Muḥammad's defeat of his relatives at the Battle of Badr.[131] These lines are tantamount to describing Yazīd himself as a pagan, and find no parallel in Ṭabarī's text. A similar reference is found later in Add 836 and the Mashhad manuscript, alluding directly to Yazīd's *kufr*.

These lines are omitted in Aya Sofya 3050, which does however share with the other two Persian manuscripts another justification for Yazīd's behaviour, one which the Caliph himself puts to Ḥusayn's son ʿAlī: Ḥusayn had broken the bond of kinship between himself and Yazīd by his rebellion and attempt to seize power from the Caliph.[132] However, this justification must be read in the context of some verses cited earlier, which are also to be found in Add 836:

> Does the community *(umma)* that killed al-Ḥusayn hope for/ the intercession of his grandfather on the day of judgement?[133]

This line is followed by:

> O men who have rashly killed Ḥusayn,/ do expect torture and chastisement. You have been cursed by the tongue of the son of David,/ and of Moses, and of the bringer of the Gospels.

These quotations make it clear that there is no justification for Ḥusayn's death. Thus despite the differences in detail between the texts of the *Tārīkhnāma* at this point, they concur in placing responsibility onto Yazīd. In this they differ significantly from Ṭabarī's treatment of the episode.

Ṭabarī offers seven different accounts of Yazīd's reaction to the news of Ḥusayn's defeat and his reception of his head and the prisoners.[134] These are summarized below with a note of the most significant transmitters of the *isnād* of each:

131 *Tārīkhnāma*, IV, p. 715; Fatih 4285, f. 290b.
132 Add 836, f. 197b; *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, p. 274; *Tārīkhnāma*, IV, p. 714; Fatih 4285, f. 290b, Aya Sofya 3050, f. 306a.
133 *Tārīkhnāma*, IV, p. 711; Fatih 4285, f. 289b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 305b.
134 Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, pp. 374–383.

1 Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī – Yazīd b. Rawḥ (whose grandfather was a Syrian appointed governor of Medina by the loyal Umayyad servant Muslim b. ʿUqba, and who supported Marwān's claim to the caliphate)—al-Ghāz of Ḥimyar (otherwise unknown): Zaḥr b. Qays, ʿUbaydallāh's messenger, reports the news to Yazīd, 'whose eyes filled with tears'. Yazīd repeats the speech cited by Balʿamī above, and refuses to reward the messenger.

2 Abū Mikhnāf—al-Qāsim b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (a *mawlā* of Yazīd who gave reports about the Syrians at the Battle of Ṣiffīn): Yazīd on seeing the head 'recited:

> [Swords] split the skulls of men who are dear
> to us; but they were more disobedient and oppressive.

[Then he added,] 'Yet, by God, Ḥusayn, if I had been to fight you, I would not have killed you.'[135]

3 Abū Mikhnāf—otherwise unknown informants: The prisoners are presented to Yazīd, who criticizes Ḥusayn's rebellion to his surviving son ʿAlī. However, Yazīd also criticizes ʿUbaydallāh ('Ibn Marjāna') severely for his action.

4 Abū Mikhnāf—Fāṭima, daughter of ʿAlī: The account starts, 'When we were made to sit before Yazīd he showed pity to us, ordered things for us and was kind to us.'[136] Yazīd's womenfolk join Ḥusayn's womenfolk in weeping for him. The Caliph tells ʿAlī, 'God curse Ibn Marjāna, if I had been with your father, he would never have asked a favour without it being granted to him; I would have protected him from death with all my power, even through the destruction of some of my own children.'[137]

5 Ḥārith b. Kaʿb – Fāṭima: Fāṭima is again reported to praise Yazīd's kindness.

6 Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī – ʿAwāna b. al-Ḥakam al-Kalbī: This report is slightly more critical of Yazīd, who calls Ḥusayn 'a disloyal relative and a wrongdoer'. He tells Fāṭima that he was 'unwilling for this to happen'. Sukayna, Ḥusayn's daughter, praises Yazīd with the distinctly backhanded compliment that 'I never saw a man who did not believe in God who was better than Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya.'[138]

7 Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī – Abū Mikhnāf – Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī (a traditionist of Shīʿite leanings): The most critical report, which states that Yazīd was poking Ḥusayn's mouth with a cane until one of the Companions, Abū Barza al-Aslamī, shouted at him to stop

135 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, p. 170.
136 Ibid, p. 171.
137 Ibid, p. 172.
138 Ibid, p. 175.

for 'how often have I seen the Apostle of God kiss it.'[139] This part of the report is adopted by Balʿamī[140] who ignores Yazīd's instruction to his wife, also mentioned here, that she mourn for Ḥusayn, and his curse on ʿUbaydallāh.

A few more reports about the aftermath of Ḥusayn's death follow, dealing, for instance with its reception in Medina. The passage concludes with some lines cited elsewhere by Balʿamī:[141]

O men who have rashly killed Ḥusayn,
do expect torture and chastisement.
[All the people of heaven,
prophets, angels and tribes prosecute you.][142]
You have been cursed by the tongue of the son of David,
and of Moses, and of the bringer of the Gospels.[143]

In the context of the preceding reports where the blame for the death has been shifted comprehensively onto ʿUbaydallāh, the lines form an appropriate conclusion, redoubling the indictment of the Umayyad governor. For in none of Ṭabarī's accounts is Yazīd depicted as he is in Balʿamī, cynically feigning horror at Ḥusayn's death for the sake of public opinion, while privately delighted. Ṭabarī's first two reports come from pro-Umayyad informants, so it is hardly surprising that they try to exculpate Yazīd. Extraordinary, however, is the use of Ḥusayn's own family, in the form of Fāṭima, to present a picture a regretful, generous Yazīd, utterly the reverse of his popular image. Admittedly, as we have noted, Ṭabarī's other Shīʿite source, Thumālī, does not present such a positive image of the Caliph. Yet even here Yazīd is represented more as an oaf than anything else, and there is certainly no suggestion that Yazīd was actually responsible for Ḥusayn's death. Balʿamī's use of the sources is as peculiar as before. Central to his account is Yazīd's speech, which he cites in the version given by Yazīd b. Rawḥ, indubitably a pro-Umayyad source. Yet Balʿamī uses the speech to produce exactly the opposite effect it has in Ibn Rawḥ's account, where it is clearly intended to convince one of the sincerity of the Calpih's regret for the killing. In Balʿamī it reinforces Yazīd's hypocrisy and duplicity.

139 Ibid, p. 176.
140 Add 836, f. 197b.
141 Add 836, f. 196b, just after Ḥusayn has actually been killed; *Tārīkhnāma,* IV, p. 712; Fatih 4285, f. 289b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 306a.
142 Line omitted in the manuscripts cited in n. 141.
143 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, p. 179.

Yet Bal'amī does not content himself with merely subverting Ṭabarī's narrative, but even adds an entire new episode, according to the texts of Add 836 and the Mashhad manuscript. This is an account the authority for which on this occasion Bal'amī cites: 'Alī b. Ḥusayn, the martyr's surviving son. 'Alī recounts[144] how Yazīd would have his father's head brought into his *majlis* while he was getting drunk, and on one occasion shows it to the Byzantine ambassador. The ambassador however, embarrasses him by saying, 'If Jesus had left a young donkey to the Christians, they would have fed it crushed sesame, [and honoured it] and not have killed it.'[145] His words replicate almost exactly those of Ḥusayn himself before the battle of Karbalā'.[146] Yazīd has the ambassador executed, but he converts to Islam before his death. 'Alī concludes his account by reporting Yazīd's recital of verses claiming that by his murder of Ḥusayn he had 'set right the Battle of Badr'.[147] Bal'amī adds, 'If this story is true there is no doubt in his [Yazīd's] *kufr*…the Prophet will fight him on the Day of Resurrection.'[148]

This story of the Byzantine ambassador and his conversion, which I have not been able to trace to any other early source, is most curious. It is highly Shī'ite in tone. Indeed, the figure of the Frank who converts in such circumstances is present in the *ta'ziyya* or passion-play which Shī'ites perform in Muḥarram in commemoration of the murder. However, this figure was not introduced into the *ta'ziyya* until the nineteenth century, where he serves to confer a 'dimension of universality' to the play,[149] much as he does here. Furthermore, the suggestion that Yazīd was a guilty of *kufr* is again Shī'ite in tone.

Bal'amī's narrative of Ḥusayn's death is perhaps the most perplexing in the entire *Tārīkhnāma*. He undermines Ṭabarī's account throughout, using his few Shī'ite sources or subverting his Sunnī ones. Yet would his audience have been remotely aware that this is what he was doing? With the exception of 'Alī b. Ḥusayn's report about Yazīd just cited, at no point does he mention any of the authorities by name. It is only a close examination of Ṭabarī's work and its translation which reveals Bal'amī's treatment. It is probably safe to assume that Bal'amī's intended audience did not have the opportunity or inclination to do this. Thus they were presented with a narrative from an impeccably Sunnī authority which tended much more towards the Shī'ite view than they could have imagined. Yet for all Bal'amī's subversion of Ṭabarī's accounts, there is little in most of them which is of itself obviously Shī'ite, with the exception of Bal'amī's own addition of the story

144 Add 836, ff. 197b-198a; *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, pp. 274–6.

145 Add 836, f. 197b; *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, pp. 274–5.

146 Add 836, ff. 194b–195a; *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, p. 264; *Tārīkhnāma*, p. 707; Fatih 4285, f. 288b; Aya Sofya 3050, f. 304b.

147 Add 836, f. 197b; *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, p. 275.

148 Add 836, f. 197b–198a; *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, p. 276.

149 Y.Richard, *Shi'ite Islam: Polity, Ideology, and Creed* (tr. A.Nevill), Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995, p. 105.

of the ambassador. This is perhaps because Ṭabarī's supposedly Shī'ite accounts are so anodyne and often seem calculated to support non-Shī'ite views, as with the reports transmitted from Fāṭima. Howard has noted this phenomenon with regard to some of Ṭabarī's accounts which purport to be transmitted from the Fifth Imām, where in fact Muḥammad al-Bāqir ends up endorsing 'the attitude which does not agree with the views of the Shī'ah.'[150]

It is clear that Ṭabarī's account is almost amazingly biased at this point. Perhaps it would be more accurate to suggest that the 'subverting' is done by Ṭabarī rather than Bal'amī, for this seems the best description of the former's use of the Shī'ite authorities. Ṭabarī had to include their reports to make his work look credible, but selected them carefully to support a particular view. It is beyond the scope of this book to discuss why Ṭabarī should have been so rabidly pro-Umayyad, but in this context Bal'amī's treatment of the Arabic original looks more like a much needed readjustment than anything else. Yet why would Bal'amī be concerned to moderate Ṭabarī's pro-Umayyad tendencies? It would be easy to suggest that Ṭabarī's account could simply not be taken seriously at this point and therefore had to be amended. Yet if this were true, Bal'amī seems to verge towards the opposite extreme by basing his accounts on Muḥammad al-Bāqir and by introducing 'Alī b. Ḥusayn's account of Yazīd's majlis. There is no easy explanation available for Bal'amī's treatment of this episode. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, sympathy for the 'Alids was widespread among Sunnīs in the fourth/tenth century as is illustrated by the popularity in Khurāsān of names such as Ḥusayn. This feeling doubtless influenced Bal'amī's adaptation of Ṭabarī in this instance, for Ṭabarī's bias in favour of Yazīd would not have been acceptable to an audience with 'Alid sympathies. At this date both Sunnis and Shī'ites were able to share in grief at the massacre of the 'Alids. In later centuries, when divisions between Sunnī and Shī'ī had become more firmly entrenched, this was no longer the case, and the passage was omitted in later manuscripts.

150 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, p. xiv.

# 5
# The *Tārīkhnāma* after Balʿamī

The *Tārīkhnāma* proved to be overwhelmingly popular, far more so than Ṭabarī's Arabic original. For nearly a thousand years it was the main historical source for Muslims wherever the Persian language held sway, from India to Central Asia, from Istanbul to Iran. Not only was the Persian itself endlessly copied and recopied but it was also translated into the three other main languages of Islamic civilization, Arabic, Ottoman and Chaghatay Turkish, as well as Urdu. As late as the twentieth century, the last chief qāḍī of the Khanate of Bukhārā, Ṣadr-i Ḍiyā', had a copy of the Persian *Tārīkhnāma* in his library, where it was apparently one of the most valuable manuscripts.[1] In the neighbouring Khanate of Khīvā the poet and historian Bayānī had just translated the work into Chaghatay in the final years of the nineteenth century, the third translation into that language to be made. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries an Ottoman Turkish version of the work was printed at least six times in Istanbul and Cairo.

Some of the attraction of the *Tārīkhnāma* was doubtless that being much shorter than Ṭabarī's Arabic, it was also much quicker and cheaper to copy.[2] However, much of its popularity derived in part from the fact it served many different purposes. It could be used to teach the basics of Islamic history, to illustrate moral points, to legitimize the regime, to attack heresy and as an historical source in its own right. Alternatively, it could also be a polished work of literature suitable for the entertainment of highly cultured courts, while it also appealed to Ṣūfīs. The sheer variety of uses of the text is one reason why the manuscripts exhibit such great differences: in order to transmit the most 'benefits' to their audience, copyists felt free to alter it to stress the elements most apposite to their circumstances.

## Reflections of contemporary concerns in the Persian text of the *Tārīkhnāma* after Balʿamī

It was suggested in Chapter 2 that an important cause of the discrepancies between the Persian manuscripts was the political or sectarian affiliations of scribes or their patrons. To assess the history of the *Tārīkhnāma's* text a study of some specific examples of how the intellectual climate and political milieu affected the scribes' work would therefore be

1 S.Vahidov and A.Erkinov, 'Le *fihrist* (catalogue) de la bibliotheque de Ṣadr-i Ẓiyâ': une image de la vie intellectuelle dans le Mavarannahr (fin XIX$^{e}$—début XX$^{e}$ siecles)' in A. Muminov, F.Richard and M.Szuppe (eds), *Patrimoine manuscrit et vie intellectuelle de l'Asie centrale islamique,* Tashkent and Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1999, p. 154.
2 C.F.Robinson, *Islamic Historiography,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 110.

xdesirable. However, as ever with the *Tārīkhnāma*, the situation is more complex than it at first appears. Such a study is dependent on the availability of information on the date and place of the manuscripts' copying. Many manuscripts contain the scribe's name and the date of copying, but comparatively few mention the place of copying and even fewer the patron for whom the manuscript was made. The sole significant manuscript which tells us the patron's name is Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Fatih 4281, which purports to have been written for the Īlkhānid ruler of Iran, Ghāzān, in 725/1324–5. As Ghāzān Khān had long since died (in 704/1304–5), we must discount the information given by the manuscript. It was probably inserted to increase the book's market value.[3]

Many copyists do include their own names, which usually have *nisbas* indicating a town or region with which the copyist had a connection. RAS, Persian 22, for instance, was copied by Muḥammadshāh b. ʿAlī b. Maḥmūd b. Shādbakht al-Hāfiẓ al-Iṣfahānī, and completed on Saturday, 18 Shawwal 701/15 June 1302. However, it does not follow that the scribe necessarily lived in Iṣfahān. People were also given the nisbas of a city in which they had resided for a cetain period, even if they currently lived somewhere else, or even because they had traded in the products of a given place.[4] *Nisbas* do not, therefore, allow us to judge with any accuracy where a manuscript was written, and without this information we cannot surmise what circumstances may have influenced its text. Furthermore, even where we do have the necessary details, they do not always aid our understanding of the text's contents, as the following two examples show.

The Mashhad manuscript published by Mīnuvī was written in Erzincan by Isḥāq b. Muḥammad b. ʿUmar b. Muḥammad al-Shirvānī in the middle of Muḥarram 586/February 1190.[5] This in itself shows how misleading *nisbas* can be, for Erzincan in Eastern Anatolia is hundreds of miles away from the province of Shirvān which is located in the current Republic of Azerbaijan. At this date Erzincan was the capital of the Mengücekids, one of the many relatively obscure Turkish dynasties which came to dominate Anatolia after the defeat of the Byzantines at the Battle of Manzikert in 1071.[6] The Mengücekids were enthusiastic promoters of culture, patrons of the poet Niẓāmī of Ganja, so it is unsurprising that a manuscript of the *Tārīkhnāma* was copied under their rule. It appears to have been a royal commission, for a note at the start of the

3 For an example of a false dedication added to another manuscript for this reason, see A. Soudavar, 'The concepts of *"al-aqdamo aṣaḥḥ"* and *"yaqin-e sābeq"* and the problem of semi-fakes', *Studia Iranica* 28(1999), pp. 264–6.

4 S.D.Goitein, 'Changes in the Middle East (950–1150) as illustrated by the documents of the Cairo Geniza' in D.S.Richards (ed.), *Islamic Civilisation 950–1150: papers on Islamic history III*, Oxford: B.Cassirer, 1973, p. 23.

5 Balʿamī, *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī: ḥavādith-i sālhā-yi 15 tā 132 hijrī*, M.Mīnuvī (ed.), Tehran: Bunyād-i Farhang-i Īrān, 1345, p. 490.

6 On the Mengücekids, see N. Sakaoğlu, *Türk Anadolu'da Mengücekoğulları*, Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2005.

manuscript states that it belonged to the library of the Mengücekid ruler Bahrāmshāh b. Dā'ūd (r. 560/1165–622/1225).[7] Yet the main peculiarities of the manuscript's text cannot be explained satisfactorily by our knowledge of the cultural environment in which it was composed. For instance, the Mashhad manuscript contains an extremely detailed section on the death of Yazdagird b. Shahriyār, the last Sāsānian ruler, giving a number of different accounts of his murder.[8] It is by no means obvious why this should have been of especial interest to anyone living in sixth/twelfth century Erzincan, for the majority of Muslims there would have been Turks. Indeed, the sole mention of the Turks in the passage relates that Māhūya, the *marzubān* (march lord) of Marv, who by some accounts was responsible for Yazdagird's murder, was assisted mainly by Turks as well as Persians in hunting the fleeing *shāhānshāh*.[9] While it would be an exaggeration to suggest that Yazdagird's murder is presented as a great tragedy, it certainly is portrayed as the cruel murder of a somewhat pitiful but pious individual.[10] There does not appear to be a positive interpretation which can be attached easily to the Turks' involvement, which is perhaps somewhat surprising given the Turkic milieu in which the manuscript was copied.

A further example from the same manuscript can be found in the discussion of Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī's death. The text of the manuscript is very similar to that of Add 836 analysed in Chapter 4, where it was argued that it is strongly pro-ʿAlid. ʿAlid sympathies are not of course necessarily synonymous with Shīʿism, but it is highly unlikely that this passage would have been *introduced* into the textual tradition in the strongly Sunnī atmosphere of Mengücekid Erzincan. It was almost certainly already there, and was simply preserved in copying from an earlier manuscript.

A manuscript from the Bodleian Library in Oxford, Elliot 377, provides a further illustration of the problems of interpreting the text. Elliot 377 was copied in Tabrīz in 944/1537–8. Tabrīz was under the control of the strongly Shīʿite Ṣafavids at this date, although the Ottomans had occupied it briefly after their victory over Shāh Ismāʿīl at the Battle of Çaldıran in 920/1514. Ismāʿīl had imposed Shīʿism on Iran by the sword, and we might expect to find some reflection of this in the text of Elliot 377. However, in fact it is extremely conservative: there is no omission of the chapters on

7 Balʿamī, *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, p. 5. On Bahrāmshāh, see Sakaoğlu, *Türk Anadolu'da Mengücekoğulları*, pp. 67–88.

8 Balʿamī, *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, pp. 94–101. The text is similar to that given in Bodleian, Laud Or 323, f. 191ff.

9 Ibid, p. 94. When Yazdagird asked Māhūya for help, the latter 'brought down the army of the Turks on him'.

10 One of the accounts cited by the manuscript indicates that Yazdagird gave away his disguise as an army officer by his refusal to eat without certain Zoroastrian rites being performed. Given that the text was presumably written for a Muslim audience who may not have been entirely sympathetic to Zoroastrian piety, this incident is of course susceptible to an alternative interpretation, that Yazdagird's death was the result of his adherence to a false religion. Nevertheless, I believe that the generally negative account of his death supports the interpretation I suggest above.

'Uthmān's lineage (as in RAS, Persian 22); the formula *raḍiya Allāh 'anhu*—may God be pleased with him—is retained after the names of the first three caliphs whose legitimacy is rejected by Shī'ite Islam; and the account of the reign of 'Alī contains no exceptional departures from most other manuscripts. The text's contents thus appear to be wholly unaffected by the political atmosphere of the milieu and period in which it was copied.

The cases of Bodleian, Elliot 377 and the Mashhad manuscript illustrate that even when we do have relevant information about when and where a work was copied, it is not always helpful in allowing us to interpret interpolations or variants in the text. Scribes were (if they wished) quite capable of copying works exactly, so a late manuscript may well contain a much earlier text. This is one of the reasons why establishing the Persian text is so difficult—it is often impossible to tell why, where and when changes in the text were made. Nonetheless, as the Shī'ite orientated RAS, Persian 22 shows, such changes were indeed made, but even here it is impossible to tell if this was done when the manuscript was copied at the beginning of the eighth/ fourteenth century. The manuscript's Shī'ite sympathies may indeed reflect the rather fluid religious atmosphere of the Īlkhānid period, but it is equally possible that the scribe just copied it directly from an older manuscript which already contained its rather problematic text.[11]

Thus it is in general impossible to judge exactly how political and religious circumstances affected the text of the *Tārīkhnāma*. However, some light can be shed on this problem by examining Bal'amī's work from an art historical perspective. Teresa Fitzherbert has produced a detailed and valuable study of the illustrated manuscript of Bal'amī held in the Freer Gallery. Illustrated manuscripts of Bal'amī are extremely rare, so the Freer manuscript cannot be considered entirely representative, but it worth pausing to consider her conclusions for the light they shed on the treatment of the *Tārīkhnāma* after Bal'amī's death.

According to Fitzherbert, the Freer manuscript was probably copied and illustrated in the Jazīra around 1300AD, perhaps for the Īlkhānid governor of Mosul, Fakhr al-Dīn 'Īsā.[12] She argues that the themes of the illustrations, which are rather different from those found in other Īlkhānid manuscripts such as the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, indicate that such subjects were chosen for depiction because of their particular relevance to the circumstances of the Īlkhānate after the conversion of the Īlkhān Ghāzān to Islam shortly before his accession to the throne in 694/1295. The devastating consequences of the Mongol conquests and the Īlkhānids' oppressive taxation policies precipitated a severe economic crisis during the last two decades of the thirteenth century. The need to find a way out of this crisis encouraged Ghāzān to improve his relationship with the Muslim, Iranian bureaucratic and religious elite, which was achieved by his own conversion to

11 As will be recalled from Chapter 2, RAS, Persian 22 is problematic not just for its Shī'ite tendencies but also for the evidence of collation it provides.

12 T.Fitzherbert, '"Bal'amī's Tabari": An illustrated manuscript of Bal'amī's *Tarjama-yi Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī* in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington (F59.16, 47.19, 30.21)', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2001, I, pp. 353–9.

Islam and his adoption of it as the official religion, in addition to some other reforms such as modifications to the taxation system.[13] Nonetheless, much of the Mongol élite retained a somewhat shaky understanding of Islam.[14] Certainly, conversion did not dampen Ghāzān's enthusiasm for prosecuting war against his fellow Muslims, the Mamlūk sultanate of Egypt and Syria.

It was against this background that the Freer Balʿamī seems to have been commissioned, and it reflects many pertinent issues, as may be seen in a good number of the illustrations Fitzherbert discusses in her comprehensive study of the manuscript's imagery. First and foremost among these is the frontispiece, which depicts the ruler enthroned, surrounded by his supporters, headed by a Qurʾānic quotation and footed by a scene of execution, symbolizing the khān's power of life and death. As Fitzherbert argues, the imagery serves to emphasize the Īlkhān's legitimacy as a traditional Islamic ruler as well as shedding light on the significance of the text to its contemporary audience:

> In the Balʿami image, the archetypal image of the enthroned ruler has been adapted to the ruler as judge, and the recipient of God's injunction to Dawud [David] to 'judge aright between mankind'. [The words of the Qurʾānic quotation heading the frontispiece: Q. 38. 26.] The Mongol ruler is therefore cast in indirect succession to Dawud—the founder of God's Kingdom on Earth for the People of the Book—and associates the portentous title of *'khalīfa'* with Ilkhanid rule…. The combination of inscription and image in the Balʿami frontispiece may therefore be seen as expressing the justification of Ilkhanid rule, for which, in time-honoured fashion, the Balʿami-Tabari text of the *Tārīkh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk* would be used as a source of political, legal and moral precedent.[15]

Fitzherbert's study of the other illustrations in the text suggests they can be grouped according to five principal themes, as follows: i) conversion to monotheism; ii) transfer of power; iii) military affairs and tactics; iv) state administration and diplomacy, including judicial affairs; v) rites of passage from youth to adulthood.[16] Thus the agenda of the illustrations reflects contemporary political and religious concerns. One of the most important of these was the question of apostasy, which may well have been a serious problem among recently converted Mongols in the aftermath of Ghāzān's embrace of Islam. Indeed, even Ghāzān himself is said to have considered apostasy at one point.[17]

13 I.P.Petrushevsky, 'Rashīd al-Dīn's conception of the state', Central Asiatic Journal 14, (1970), pp. 150–151.

14 See David Morgan's comments on the remarks made by the Mongol general Qutlugh-shāh advocating abandoning Islam: D.Morgan, The Mongols, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, pp. 162–3.

15 Fitzherbert, '"Balʿami's Tabari"', I, p. 53.

16 Ibid, I, pp. 222–3.

17 R.Amitai-Preiss, 'Ghazan, Islam and Mongol tradition: a view from the Mamlūk Sultanate', *BSOAS* 59(1996), pp. 2–3.

Naturally, the Mamlūks did not hesitate to take advantage of the propaganda possibilities offered by the Īlkhānate's less than wholehearted conversion. Both Ibn Kathīr and Ibn Taymiyya attacked the Mongols' charade of Islamization.[18]

Not every illustration conveys a political message, for many clearly had a didactic purpose, reinforcing the lessons of the text. However, let us examine some instances where the imagery does indeed seem to reflect the circumstances of the early eighth/fourteenth century Īlkhānate. Fitzherbert suggests that the illustration showing the Abyssinian convert, Waḥshī, slaying the false prophet Musaylima during the *Ridda* wars may have been composed in response to Ibn Taymiyya's anti-Mongol polemic which insinuated that even an Abyssinian slave was better than an infidel ruler. 'In the light of Mamluk jibes, it may have been useful for recent Mongol converts to be acquainted with the story of Waḥshī.'[19] Alternatively, the illustration may have been intended to underline the Īlkhānate's legitimacy to its Muslim subjects. The narrative emphasizes that the Muslim general Khālid b. al-Walīd praised Waḥshī's military prowess both before and after his conversion. This indicates that the moral of the story is actually that Waḥshī's innate good qualities which led to him overcoming Musaylima had always been present in him. For a reader in the eighth/fourteenth century, an inescapable parallel would have been with the extirpation of the Ismā'īlīs. That heretical sect had been destroyed by Hūlagū, the pagan Mongol conqueror of Iran, and their demise was one of the principal ways in which the Īlkhānate's Muslim servants managed to justify their masters' rule in the *Dār* al-Islām.[20] The Freer Bal'amī illustration probably serves a similar legitimatory purpose.

Religious concerns are also raised by the depiction of Nimrod, the idolatrous king, casting Abraham into flames which do not injure him. Nimrod then ascends to heaven to challenge God, as discussed in Chapter 3.[21] Perhaps the illustration may be seen as an attack on Ghāzān's father, the Īlkhān Arghūn, a Buddhist (i.e. idolater) who reduced the status of Muslims (analogous to Nimrod's hostility to Abraham). At any rate, the demise of the idolater would have a theme of particular relevance in the period after Ghāzān's conversion.

Similar contemporary issues are reflected in the illustration of Alexander the Great receiving the coffin of Darius, the defeated Achaemenid emperor.[22] The analogy of the transition from Persian to foreign rule in Mongol times would not have been lost a contemporary audience.[23] Alexander's rule, a synthesis of Persian and foreign elements, could be seen as a paradigm for the Īlkhānate, and rulers such as Ghāzān would doubtless have wished for their behaviour to be compared to that of the famously just and

18 Fitzherbert, '"Bal'ami's Tabari'", I, pp. 68–70, citing T.Raff, *Remarks on an Anti-Mongol Fatwā by Ibn Taymīya*, Leiden 1973, *passim*. [Unpublished typescript].
19 Ibid, I, p. 204, and see also pp. 201–4.
20 See Juvaini, *History of the World-Conqueror* (tr. J.Boyle), Manchester and Paris: Manchester University Press and UNESCO, 1997, p. 618 ff., and the comments by Morgan in ibid, p. xxi.
21 Fitzherbert, '"Bal'ami's Tabari'", I, pp. 88–95.
22 Ibid, I, pp. 127–9.
23 Ibid, I, p. 129.

honourable Alexander. Indeed, Fitzherbert quotes the Mongol apologist Ibn Ṭiqṭaqā's justification of Hūlagū's conquest by that ruler's commitment to justice.[24] Thus the illustration underlines and supports the Qur'ānic exhortation to just rule found in the frontispiece.

The illustrations indicate that the Mongols saw the *Tārīkhnāma* as a means of legitimizing their rule that could teach lessons relevant to their circumstances. In Fitzherbert's words, 'the lessons appear particularly apposite to the period associated with state consolidation following Ghazan's conversion and accession in 694/1295',[25] although she argues that the illustrations generally serve to draw attention to aspects of conversion, not idolatry, heresy or sectarian divisions within Islam. It was, in her view, a pragmatic approach to what she sees as Balʿamī's 'bland' text, which aimed to appeal to a Ḥanafī audience that was also sympathetic to ʿAlī.[26] Fitzherbert argues that one of main reasons for the *Tārīkhnāma's* continuing relevance is that the political circumstances during the early Muslim Īlkhānate were similar to those when Balʿamī was commissioned to translate the work. In both cases, the states had to cope with an influx of recent converts who presumably needed teaching the basic tenets of Islam as well as loyalty to their rulers in turbulent times. The Freer manuscript, Fitzherbert argues, was not intended to be read by the governor Fakhr al-Dīn ʿĪsā himself, but rather was aimed at instructing members of his household:

> The size and design of the manuscript would have lent itself to small-group teaching for, say, half a dozen pupils at a time, and also at several levels of tuition. For example, the illustrations could be used to introduce the stories to the very young or illiterate; at level two, the positioning of the paintings at carefully selected points in the text would identify a practical and coherent cycle of anecdotal moral tales in the manner of a simple mirror for princes; at a more advanced level, the ruled headings would expand upon the themes already identified by the paintings and act as signposts through a further series of historically important or contentious issues with a bias towards matters associated with conversion, bureaucracy and military affairs.[27]

As Fitzherbert rightly notes, a 'clutch' of Balʿamī manuscripts survive from Ghāzān's reign, and her suggestion that this may have been a result of a'general teaching initiative current in government circles at the time' is credible if impossible to prove.[28] The remaining, unillustrated, manuscripts could have been used for paedagogical purposes as well. As a cheaper alternative to paintings, teachers could easily provide a verbal exegesis of the text, pointing out morals and contemporary parallels.

24 Ibid, I, p. 365.
25 Ibid, I, p. 291.
26 Ibid, I, pp. 245, 267.
27 Ibid, I, p. 369.
28 Ibid, I, p. 371.

As these explanations were oral, they have not survived. However, a passage in Leiden University Library, Or 1612 illustrates very clearly the sort of uses to which Bal'amī's text could be put. The manuscript contains the usual extensive accounts of Moses' life and prophethood, and towards the end of the chapter entitled *Khabar-i Raftan-i Mūsā bi-Munājāt*[29] discusses different traditions about Moses' request to see God. 'Some people say he sought the cause (*'illat*) of *tawḥīd* (God's unity), but *tawḥīd* no cause and thus seeking its cause is considered an error in law (*sharī'at*). There follows criticism of the Ismā'īlī ('Bāṭinī') attempts to do exactly that, after which a new chapter heading announces the main body of the interpolation: *Dhikr-i Madhhab-i Bāṭinīān*, which proves to be an attack on various aspects of Ismā'īlī belief. The chapter starts with an attack on Ismā'īlī desires 'to destroy…the *sharī'at*' and in particular on their attribution of hidden (*bāṭin*) meanings to words such as the profession of faith, *lā ilāh illā Allāh*.[30] 'When common people (*'avvām*) hear this, they despair and think that there is something to it, whereas there is not.'[31] The remainder of the passage attacks various flaws in Ismā'īlī thought: 'Another [thing] I say to them [the Ismā'īlīs] is, if the *bāṭin* must be hidden, how can you prove it to anyone else?'[32] The polemic continues for a few lines, and then the scribe comments, 'now let us return to the main narrative, for this discussion is not present in this book and probably Muḥammad b. Jarīr [Ṭabarī] would not approve.'

Like the Freer manuscript, Leiden University Library, Or 1612 was probably written in the reign of Ghāzān, as is indicated by an appendix to the *Tārīkhnāma* which brings the history up to date with brief sections on dynasties such as the Sāmānids and the Ghūrids, and a rather more detailed discussion of the Mongols, both Great Khāns and Īlkhāns.[33] Arghūn is the last of the latter whose reign is recorded, and it is therefore reasonable to suggest that the lost colophon would have confirmed that the manuscript was written during the reign of his son Ghāzān. Moreover, the same appendix confirms the scribe's interest in Ismā'īlism, for it contains a brief account of Hūlagū's destruction of the great Ismā'īlī stronghold, Alamūt. This chapter is entitled *Dhikr-i Siparī Shudan-i Ayyām-i Dawlat-i Malāḥida*, Account of the End of the Days of the Heretics' State.[34] This is followed by a reasonably well-informed history of Ismā'īlism from its foundation to the Mongol period, which gives particular detail on the split between Nizārī and Musta'līan Ismā'īlism and on Ismā'īlism under the Saljūqs, particularly the assassination of Niẓām al-Mulk.[35] In this context, it is unsurprising that the scribe should have used passages in the *Tārīkhnāma* to illustrate points about an issue which

29 Leiden University Library, Or 1612, ff. 60a–61b.
30 Ibid, f. 61b.
31 Ibid, f. 62a.
32 Ibid, loc. cit.
33 Ibid, f. 353b ff.
34 Ibid, f. 392b.
35 Ibid, f. 393a–394b.

oncerned him, the Ismāʿīlī heresy. It is also very probable that he would have drawn similar parallels between the actions of kings and prophets of old and his own Mongol masters, just as the Freer scribe did. However, only the one passage discussed has survived in the text. It may not enhance our knowledge of Ismāʿīlism, but it does illustrate graphically one of the multitude of purposes to which episodes from Balʿamī could be put.

Another reason for the *Tārīkhnāma's* relevance in the Mongol period was probably its presentation of the orthodox Muslim view of prophecy. A few years before Ghāzān came to power this had been radically challenged by the chief minister of the pagan Īlkhān Arghūn (r. 683/1284–690/1291), the Jew Saʿd al-Dawla. In an attempt to ingratiate himself with the Īlkhān, Saʿd al-Dawla declared that Genghis Khan was a prophet, and that as prophethood was hereditary, Arghun should imitate Muḥammad in founding a new universal umma and turn the Kaʿba into a pagoda.[36] After Ghāzān's conversion to Islam, it was doubtless in his interests to reassure Muslims that such discreditable ideas had been done away with under his regime in order to allay suspicions that the newly Muslim Īlkhānate might be prepared to pervert Muslim dogma in this way. The Īlkhānate's patronage of the *Tārīkhnāma* may well have been intended as a public statement of its orthodoxy.

Thus the *Tārīkhnāma* provided not just a comprehensive yet readable introduction to Islamic history, ideal for recent converts and the young, but also served as a source of analogies with the contemporary political situation. It could be adapted both to legitimize Mongol rule and to teach the rudiments of Islam. However, while this explains Balʿamī's relevance in Ghāzān's reign, it leaves many questions unanswered. Did the *Tārīkhnāma* enjoy a sudden upsurge in popularity as a result of its suitability for the circumstances of the newly islamized Īlkhānate, or rather are the sudden plethora of manuscripts surviving from this period due to the destruction of earlier ones in the Mongol conquests? If indeed the *Tārīkhnāma* became so popular under the Mongols due to its relevance for a newly converted society, how can we explain its enduring relevance in such very different circumstances as the thoroughly Islamized societies of Tīmūrid Herat, Süleyman the Magnificent's empire, or nineteenth-century Khīvā? Ghāzān's interest in the deeds of Alexander shows that Balʿamī's work potentially continued to appeal to the ruling élite too, as is testified by the interest in the *Tārīkhnāma* evinced by later monarchs. How can we explain the popularity of the work with educated élites as much as with recent converts? It is to some of these problems that I now turn.

## The *Tārīkhnāma* as an historical source for the Persophone world

Most extant Persian histories of the Ghaznavid and Saljūq period appear to be uninfluenced by Balʿamī or Ṭabarī, at least in terms of structure. Thus while Gardīzī's

36 A.Bausani, 'Religion under the Mongols', in CHIV, p. 541, citing Vaṣṣāf. See also J. Aubin, *Emirs mongols et vizirs persans dans les remous de l'acculturation*, Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, 1995 (*Cahiers de Studia Iranica* 15), pp. 43–4.

*Zayn al-Akhbār*, another Ghaznavid work, also treats in passing pre-Islamic and early Islamic history, it does so in a very different way from the *Tārīkhnāma:* rather than the intermingling of stories of prophets and kings as in Balʿamī and Ṭabarī, chronological order according to dynasty predominates. Thus all kings belonging to the legendary Iranian Pīshdādian dynasty are grouped together, followed by the Kayānids, and so on. This was to become a popular paradigm for later universal histories such as the ninth/fifteenth century *Rawḍat al-Ṣafā* of Mīrkhwānd.

The first independent evidence for Balʿamī's work may come from the early sixth/twelfth century, when it was quoted extensively in the Persian *History of the Prophets* attributed to Ghazālī. Much of the text of the latter work is almost identical to that of some of the Persian manuscripts of Balʿamī, as was first noted by Sprenger in 1848.[37] Indeed, despite the title of the book, it also includes accounts of pre-Islamic kings just as the *Tārīkhnāma* does. The author's apparent failure to acknowledge his predecessor's work was of course entirely typical of pre-modern Islamic writers and should not be considered plagiarism.

The first direct external reference to Balʿamī occurs in the anonymous *Mujmal al-Tawārīkh wa-'l-Qiṣaṣ* composed around or slightly after 520/1126. The work is 'a general history which includes a brief account of the Saljūqs' and was probably composed by a scholar from Asadābād in the Jibāl for a Saljūq prince.[38] At the start of the section on the history of the Prophet, the author records how Ṭabarī's *History*, one of his main sources, came to be translated into Persian: the work was undertaken by Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Balʿamī by order of Manṣūr b. Nūḥ, which was conveyed to him by Fā'iq al-Khāṣṣa in 352AH. The History contained concise accounts of the genealogies and lives of prophets, and thus should be made available to a wider audience.[39] The wording is extremely close to that of the Arabic prefaces of the *Tārīkhnāma* from which this information is unquestionably derived. It is interesting that the author of the *Mujmal* should stress the utility of Ṭabarī as a source of prophets' biographies. Earlier, he had specifically noted the lack of information on Iranian kings in Ṭabarī:

> Muḥammad b. Jarīr Ṭabarī has explained all historical reports *(akhbār),* but he did not recount much of the biographies of the kings of Persia (*ʿAjam*) who lived in the Fourth Clime, the greatest kings of the world. He related only briefly in his *History* the subject of their kingship,

37 See A.Sprenger, 'Balʿamy's translation of the History of Tabary, and Ghazzály's History of the Prophets', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 17(1848), pp. 437–471, including an edition of selections from both texts.

38 J.S.Meisami, *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999, pp. 188, 207.

39 *Mujmal al-Tawārīkh wa-'l-Qiṣaṣ*, M.Bahār (ed.), Tehran: Khāvar, 1317, p. 180.

> and although accounts of our kings, emperors *(akāsira va shāhān)* and great men are well known outside of [Ibn] Jarīr's *History*…. I wanted to collect the history of the kings of Persia, their genealogies, conduct and lifestyle in this book in a concise manner.[40]

The author goes on to list the sources to which he has had recourse to make up for this lacuna in Ṭabarī, Firdawsī's Shāhnāma, Ibn al-Muqaffa', Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī and so on. The *Mujmal's* treatment of Persian kings certainly owes little to Bal'amī or Ṭabarī. Like the *Zayn al-Akhbār*, it divides the pre-Islamic Iranian kings into four *ṭabaqas*: the Pīshdādids, the Kayānids, the Ashkānids and the Sāsānids.[41] Thus Bal'amī's appeal for this author, at least, had nothing to do with his presentation of Iranian material, but rather was due to his comprehensive treatment of prophets and early Islamic history, for it is in these sections of the *Mujmal* that the debt to the *Tārīkhnāma* is clearest, and is indeed acknowledged.

The decline of interest in universal history throughout the Persophone world between the fourth/tenth century and the Mongol period is a principal reason why Ṭabarī and Bal'amī are cited so infrequently by other sources. Historians preferred to write histories of their towns or provinces, such as Ibn Funduq's *Tārīkh-i Bayhaq*, or else of specific dynasties, as the popularity of the translation of 'Utbī's *Ta'rīkh al-Yamīnī* by Jurbādhqānī attests. Even those works which do show some interest in the more remote past, such as Ibn al-Balkhī's *Fārsnāma* and the *Mujmal al-Tawārīkh wa-'l-Qiṣaṣ* itself, tend to have a markedly regional character. It is impossible to ascertain whether the decline marks a genuine shift in tastes, or whether the old universal histories continued to be so widely popular that no one saw any need to produce new ones. Certainly, the author of the *Mujmal* writes as if Bal'amī/Ṭabarī were his basic source, and there is almost a hint of surprise in his tone on remarking that he had to supplement their deficiencies from other works. Yet his book is in fact predominantly based on other sources.

There is little evidence as to whether Ṭabarī's work was more commonly read in its Arabic or Persian versions in this period. The *Mujmal's* quotation of the *Tārīkhnāma* indicates that at least in this instance Bal'amī's version was used. The Saljūqs promoted Persian as the language of their bureaucracy (in contrast to their predecessors the Būyids, for example) and the case of Jurbādhqānī illustrates the demand for Persian versions of Arabic classics, however much they might diverge from the original. Cahen argues that from the mid-sixth/twelfth century onwards 'there are two families of histories, each ignorant of the other, separated by a cleavage of language'.[42] It was doubtless the

40 Ibid, p. 2.
41 Ibid, pp. 24–38.
42 C.Cahen, 'The historiography of the Seljukid period' in Bernard Lewis and P.M.Holt, *Historians of the Middle East*, London: SOAS, 1962, p. 75.

growing ignorance of Arabic which led to Balʿamī's translation supplanting Ṭabarī's original in the *mashriq*, as well as the relative economy of copying the shorter work.

It is therefore entirely possible that the *Tārīkhnāma* already had the status of a classic by the time of the Mongol invasions whose legacy of destruction must inevitably leave this question shrouded in obscurity. However, Mongol rule confirmed and strengthened the work's popularity. Not only was Balʿamī an invaluable tool for political, religious and moral teaching, as has been discussed above, but Mongol rule also promoted a resurgence of writing of universal history, for which a basic source was 'Ṭabarī', which probably generally means Balʿamī.[43] Admittedly, universal historiography changed dramatically, being much more genuinely universal with interests outside the relative narrow confines of the contemporary Islamic world and a few adjoining territories to which earlier chroniclers such as Dīnawarī, Yaʿqūbī, Ṭabarī and Balʿamī himself had restricted their investigations. The great Īlkhānid historian Rashīd al-Dīn concentrates, of course, on the origins and conquests of the Mongols, but such recondite themes as the history of the Franks find a place in his *Jāmiʿ al-Tawārīkh*. Nonetheless, the old Muslim chronicles retained their importance as a source for the history of Islam and its prophets which remained a crucial element of universal historiography.

It must be admitted that there is no direct evidence that Rashīd al-Dīn himself consulted Ṭabarī in either Arabic or Persian; he makes no reference to him, and like most composers of universal chronicles, he treats the histories of prophets and kings in separate sections, preferring a chronological dynastic arrangement of the kings. Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī in his *Tārīkh-i Guzīda* (composed 730/1330) follows a similar scheme, although he does specifically acknowledge 'Ṭabarī' as a source.[44] The most interesting point of similarity between the two works is not in their treatment of historical events as such (for Mustawfī seems to owe little directly to Ṭabarī/Balʿamī) but rather in the prominence both give to debates on the duration of the world. Although all the manuscripts of fifth/eleventh century Arabic translation of Balʿamī lack the first few folios,[45] the table of contents of Leiden University Library, Or 3103 indicates the second chapter of the *Tārīkhnāma* was entitled *Bāb fī Kam Miqdār Hādhihi al-Dunyā*, Chapter on the Duration of this World. Most Persian manuscripts include such a chapter (the 'rūzgār' section), although in some it has been transposed to the very end of the pre-Islamic section.

43 However, as I have demonstrated in Chapter 2, Ṭabarī's original text, or at least parts of it, continued to be available to some scribes. Nonetheless, the survival of at least, Balʿamī manuscripts from the Mongol period as opposed to three volumes of Ṭabarī (not one a complete copy) of similar date does suggest it was Balʿamī's work which was more widely known.

44 Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī Qazvīnī, *Tārīkh-i Guzīda*, ʿA. Navāʾī (ed.), Tehran: Muʾassasa-i Amīr Kabīr, 1339, p. 6.

45 Add 836; Leiden University Library, Or 3103; Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Sprenger 45.

It is this passage in the *Tārīkhnāma* that Elton Daniel has argued was written to counter Ismā'īlī prophecies of the end of the world.[46] However, very similar concerns preoccupy Mustawfī, who also starts his book with a discussion of chronological problems. Indeed, such prefaces were a common element of early historical writing in Persian, where they were often quite stylized, as has been demonstrated for a later period by Quinn.[47] Let us examine how Mustawfī deals with the same issues as Bal'amī. 'Historians differ greatly over how much time has passed since the beginning of the world and creation of Adam', he says, and goes on to explain the different dating systems adopted by different peoples. 'The Greeks and the Romans start from the epoch of Alexander, the Yemenis from the Ethiopians' arrival in Yemen, the Copts from the reign and conquests of Nebuchanezzar, and Quraysh from the Battle of the Elephant.' This has led to much confusion. Meanwhile, philosophers (*jamā'at-i ḥukamā*) deny the world has a beginning or end, while religious scholars (*ahl-i shar'*) say it has both, but do not specify its duration. The learned of the East and the Franks (*'ulamā'-i Hind va Khiṭā va Khuttan va Chīn va Māchīn [va] bakhshīān va Firangān)* say that Adam lived a million years ago, and that there were several Adams, each speaking his own language. On the other hand, 'some of the 'ulamā' of Iran (*mutasharri'ān-i ahl-i Iran)* say that from Adam's arrival on earth to the appearance of our Prophet Muḥammad's summons [to Islam] was 6,000 years, some say more, some less.' Astrologers again use a different dating system.[48]

Mustawfī thus aims at exactly the same effect as Bal'amī (from whom at least some of the above information is probably derived[49]), that of indicating the impossibility of ascertaining the duration of the world and of showing the great divergence of opinions about it. Yet Mustawfī was living in an age where the issues Daniel raises no longer had relevance. Ismā'īlism had disappeared as a political force since Hūlāgū's assault on its mountain strongholds, and even if some of its adherents survived, they hardly presented a threat. Even if to some the Mongol conquests had seemed like the end of the world, by the time Mustawfī was writing the Īlkhānate had enjoyed more than 30 years of Islamic governance. Mustawfī hints that the real significance of this passage is to excuse any errors in his own work: 'this slave [I] records the length of each nation's rule just as I have found it in historical works and as most historians concur'.[50] Of course, it is quite probable that Mustawfī included the introduction in this form because it was conventional

46 E.Daniel, 'The Samanid "Translations" of Tabari', in H.Kennedy (ed.), *Al-Ṭabarī: a medieval Muslim historian and his work*, Princeton: Darwin Press, forthcoming, [p. 11]. See the discussion in Chapter 3.

47 S.Quinn, 'The historiography of Safavid prefaces' in C.Melville (ed.), *Pembroke Papers*, IV: *Safavid Persia: the history and politics of an Islamic society*, Cambridge: Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 1996, pp. 1–25.

48 Mustawfī, *Tārīkh-i Guzīda*, p. 8.

49 E.g. both texts mention the belief that six thousand years passed between creation and Muḥammad (c.f. *Tārīkhnāma*, I, p. 11) and mention the views of astrologers on the subject (ibid, I, p. 4).

50 Ibid, pp. 8–9.

historiographical practice to do so. The similarities to Balʿamī's preface may be due to the influence of the *Tārīkhnāma* as the oldest and most prestigious of Persian histories, and Balʿamī's preface may have had an immediate political relevance in the fourth/tenth century which it had lost it for later imitators.

Nevertheless, the example of Mustawfī's preface does show that the information provided by Balʿamī was susceptible to very different interpretations than Daniel's. Given that, as argued in Chapter 1, evidence for the threat of Transoxianan Ismāʿīlism in the 350s/960s is weak, nor is there any unambiguous indication in the text that Balʿamī was seeking to counter a suggestion of the imminent end of the world, we should be cautious about accepting Daniel's explanation of the preface. It is therefore quite possible that like Mustawfī, Balʿamī's real intention in this passage was to defuse any accusations of chronological inaccuracy on his own part and to establish his credentials as a historian.

Historians continued to cite ʿṬabarī' as a source even when their works were little influenced by the *Tārīkhnāma*, let alone the original. The two great Tīmūrid historians, Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū and Mīrkhvānd, both do so[51] and the habit was to continue up to the nineteenth century, when Muʾnis (d. 1244/ 1829), author of the Chaghatay history of the rulers of Khīva entitled the *Firdaws al-Iqbāl*, also named Ṭabarī's *History* as one of his authorities despite the fact that Ṭabarī/Balʿamī include scarcely any information that could have been of relevance to him.[52] Indeed, it seems to have become a *topos* of the prefaces to Persian historical works to acknowledge Balʿamī/Ṭabarī among the author's sources—many of which were equally spurious—whether or not the author had ever read the *Tārīkhnāma*. This reflects the fame and prestige of the latter as a historical work. On the other hand, Khvāndamīr used Balʿamī without acknowledgement, updating his simple and archaic language to suit the tastes of his own day.[53] The vocabulary and grammar of manuscripts of the *Tārīkhnāma* itself would often be 'corrected' in this way, which was one of the reasons why the work maintained its appeal for so long.

The prestige of the Persian *Tārīkhnāma* is confirmed by Hāfiẓ-i Abrū in the introduction to another of his works, the *Majmūʿa*, which is, just as its title indicates, a collection of three histories, the *Tārīkhnāma*, part of the *Jāmiʿ al-Tawārīkh* and the *Ẓafarnāma*. Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū contributes solely some brief passages linking these different works. He tells us that the Sultan Shāhrukh Bahādur (d. 850/1447) ordered him to write a *majmūʿa* which

51 Mīrkhvānd, *Tārīkh-i Rawḍat al-Ṣafā*, Tehran: Markaz-i Khayyām, 1338, I, p. 17; Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū, *Zubdat al-Tawārīkh*, Oxford, Bodleian, Elliot 357, f. 15a.

52 Munis and Agahi, *Firdaws al-Iqbāl: History of Khorezm* (tr. Y.Bregel), Leiden: Brill, 1999, p. xxxi.

53 See, for example, Khvāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-Siyar*, M.Dabīr-sīyāqī (ed.), Tehran: Markaz-i Khayyām, 1380, I, p. 246, where the account of Bahrām Chūbīn and the Turks is very close in content to Balʿamī's treatment.

'included all the elements of this art [of history]; the most famous book of history which is current in this age is the translation of the *History* of Muḥammad b. Jarīr Ṭabarī, most of the stories of which are taken from *Tafsīrs* and bear witness to the wonders of God's word *(āyāt-i kalām Allāh)*'[54] This rare mention of the translation indicates that it was in fact Bal'amī's work, not Ṭabarī's, which continued in widespread circulation; it also confirms that the reason for its popularity was its religious content.

Bal'amī's work continued to be recopied, rewritten and adapted in the Persian-speaking world until the nineteenth century.[55] However, its influence spread beyond these boundaries, for it found an even wider audience through its translations into various other oriental languages, Arabic, Ottoman, Chaghatay and Urdu. Space prevents a full analysis of all these, although it is to be hoped that future research will give them the detailed attention they deserve. The Urdu translation is probably the least important of these, apparently existing only in a unique manuscript.[56] The Chaghatay translation I discuss only briefly, as I have not been able to consult at first hand any of the manuscripts. The discussion therefore centres around the various Ottoman translations, where the aim is not to produce a detailed analysis of the texts, but rather to answer briefly the hitherto confused questions of how many translations were made, who they were made for and when, and how they relate to the Persian. First, however, I turn to the second Arabic version.

## Āmidī's Arabic translation of the *Tārīkhnāma*

Between the years 935/1528–9 and 937/1530–1, a second Arabic translation of Bal'amī's work was undertaken by a certain Khiḍr b. Khiḍr al-Āmidī. This survives in an autograph manuscript (Leiden University Library, Or 140) and consists of the second part of the *Tārīkhnāma*, covering the events between Muḥammad's prophethood and the death of Ḥusayn and Yazīd's deportation of the remaining 'Alids to Medina.[57] It is unclear whether Āmidī

54 Ḥafiẓ-i Abrū, *Majmū'a*, Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Damad İbrahim 919, f. 3b (virtually identical to the passage from the *Zubdat al-Tawārīkh* cited above).

55 For instance, an unpublished work which draws heavily on Bal'amī is the *Aṣaḥḥ al-Tawārīkh* composed in the eighth/fifteenth century by Muḥammad b. al-amīr al-kabīr Faḍl Allāh (Oxford, Bodleian, Elliot 2). One of the latest examples of this continued influence is in Bodleian, Fraser 165, a nameless history by Khusraw Muḥammad b. Amīr Dūst Muḥammad (his father ruler of Afghanistan 1819–39, 1842–63), the pre-Islamic sections of which follow Bal'amī's arrangement and from which (*'az mukhtaṣarī-yi Ṭabarī'*, f. 3b) he appears to have drawn much information.

56 Cambridge University Library, MS Add 570–571.

57 A second manuscript in the Garret Collection at Princeton appears to contain exactly the same text. See P.Hitti, N.A.Faris and B. 'Abd-al-Malik, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Garrett Collection of Arabic Manuscripts in Princeton University Library*, Princeton: Princeton University Library, 1938, p. 191, no. 582.

ever translated any of the remaining parts of Balʿamī. While he does refer to his work as 'the translation of the second part (*juz'*) of Ṭabarī's *History*',[58] the volume starts with an elaborate exordium in praise of God and the Prophet. Āmidī then inserts a 'rūzgār' section discussing the length of time passed from Adam to the Prophet. It is only after this that we find the genealogy of Muḥammad, which is the conventional start of the Islamic sections of the *Tārīkhnāma*. While the second volumes of other manuscripts of the work do occasionally contain their own exordia and colopha, this is a fairly uncommon practice, and when it does occur the exordium is rarely as extensive as in Leiden University Library, Or 140. There is no indication any other volume was intended to complete the work. It is therefore probable that the manuscript represents Āmidī's complete work.

In the absence of any other evidence about Āmidī, a certain amount of information may be derived from the manuscript itself. Every one of his five ancestors mentioned in his full name in the colophon[59] is given the title *al-ḥājjī* indicating they had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca. The second, unpaginated folio provides further evidence for his religious background where beneath the statement *mālikuhu* *wa-ṣāḥibuhul darwīsh kātibuhu* is a sketch drawing of a figure in Ṣūfī robes containing the words murshid/sanat *937*. This is the year in which Āmidī finished the translation, and it is reasonable to assume these marks refer to himself. However, if he was a Ṣūfī, he was not a well educated one, for the text abounds in errors, above all orthographic. Frequently, final *tā'* is replaced by *tā marbūṭa*, even in verbs: thus ماة not مات. *Alif maqṣūra* becomes *alif mamdūda*, so الا is found in place of الى. Some errors suggest Āmidī may not have been a native speaker of Arabic for he occasionally confuses emphatic and non-emphatic consonants, writing *ṣawṭ* for *ṣawt* and *fī wuṣṭihā* for *fī wusṭihā*. However, these errors may also have been caused by the influence of a colloquial dialect (as, for example, modern colloquial Egyptian has *ṣofra* for the classical *sufra*).

There is little exceptional in the text itself, which appears to have been translated without elaboration from a Persian manuscript current in the tenth/sixteenth century. The discussion of Muḥammad's ancestry, for instance, follows closely the text given in British Library, IO Isl. 1983 (cited in Chapter 2), as does the account of Ḥusayn's death. Āmidī includes laudatory formulae after the names of all the Rāshidūn Caliphs, and curses after the names of Yazīd and Muʿāwiya. The chapter on the *nasab ʿUthmān* is omitted, but there is none of RAS, Persian 22's obvious hostility to that Caliph. In all, it is, to adopt Fitzherbert's term, a 'bland' version of Islamic history, probably translated for its comprehensive and accessible treatment of the early traumas of the *umma*.

The importance of Āmidī's translation rests in the fact that it provides a further impression of the far-reaching influence of Balʿamī's work. It was most probably translated for use in a Ṣūfī *khānqāh* over which Āmidī presided. *Pace* my previous

58 Leiden University Library, Or 140, p. 1.
59 Ibid, p. 959.

comments on the relationship between *nisbas* and place of origin, it is very likely that Āmidī was indeed from the region of Amid (Diyarbakır). A later ownership mark shows that in the eleventh/ seventeenth century the work found its way into the hands of an Aleppan Ḥanafī (*al-Ḥanafī madhhaban/al-Ḥalabī maskanan),* and the relative proximity of Aleppo to Āmid supports the manuscript's south-eastern Anatolian provenance.[60] Furthermore, Arabic would have been widely spoken as a first language in this region, as it still is in towns such as Harran and Mardin, which explains the need for a translation from Persian. Perhaps the manuscript was used to train the *murīds* or Ṣūfī aspirants who had gathered around their *murshid,* Āmidī himself, although one would not usually expect to find such interest in history in Ṣūfī circles. Āmidī's translation had no further currency in the Arab world, doubtless due in part to its stylistic infelicities. Nonetheless, it does indicate further the multiplicity of places and ways in which Balʿamī's work could be used.

## The Ottoman translations of the *Tārīkhnāma*

The fame of Ṭabarī's work ensured that the *Tārīkhnāma* was translated into Ottoman Turkish at a relatively early date. The enduring popularity of Balʿamī in the Ottoman world is attested by the large number extant manuscripts. Undoubtedly many more exist than is recognized, but remain unknown due to the poor state of library cataloguing in Turkey.[61] In the nineteenth century, five printed editions were published (Istanbul 1260/1844, 1288/1872, 1290/1873, 1292/1875 and Būlāq 1275/1858–9).[62] It was also printed at least once in the early twentieth century.[63]

With the exception of a limited amount of work by the Turkish scholar Yurdaydin,[64] no research has been done on the Ottoman versions of Ṭabarī, and much confusion

60 The Garret manuscript was purchased in Beirut, which confirms that it was in the Levant that Āmidī's translation was being circulated.

61 It is thus impossible to begin to estimate the number of manuscripts. F.Babinger, *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und ihre Werke,* Leipzig: Harrassowitz 1927, pp. 66–7, n. 2, lists 32 manuscripts, and there are a further 13 in the Topkapı Sarayı alone, with another four in Bursa, İnebey Yazma ve Eski Baska Eserler Kütüphanesi. See also H.Yurdaydın, Maṭrāḳçı Nasuh'un hayatı ve eserleri ile ilgili yeni bilgiler' Belleten, 29, no 114 (1965), p. 340, n. 22. This is just the tip of the iceberg. I am, for example, aware of another 12 manuscripts of the work in the Milli Kütüphane in Ankara, and if a comprehensive survey could be undertaken, the number of Turkish manuscripts would probably be found to equal and possibly to exceed the number of Persian manuscripts.

62 Yurdaydın, 'Maṭrāḳçı Nasuh'un hayatı ve eserleri', p. 338.

63 *Tarih-i Tabari-yi Kebir Tercümesi kenarında Altı Parmak,* Istanbul: Uhuvvet Matbaası, 1327/1909 (3 vols).

64 In addition to the references given here, for a detailed English summary of Yurdaydın's research, see Nasūhu's-Silāḥī (Matraḳçı), *Beyān-ı Menāzil-i Sefer-i Irāḳeyn-i Sulṭān Süleymān Hān,* H.Yurdaydın (ed.), Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1976, pp. 121–5, 139–140.

remains about them. Ḥajjī Khalīfa, for instance, does not indicate that more than one translation was ever undertaken, while Babinger lists a translation by Nasuh Matrakçı, one by Hüseyin b. Sultan Ahmed, and one made for Ahmed Paşa.[65] Karatay, on the other hand, lists the following versions in his catalogue of the Turkish manuscripts in the Topkapı Palace Library (which contains 13 manuscripts of Turkish versions of Ṭabarī): the translation for Ahmed Paşa, the version by Hüseyin b. Sultan Ahmed, and a version by Hüsameddin Çelebi written in 710/1310.[66] Below, I discuss in outline the various versions I have examined.

## The Ahmed Paşa translation

The text of the great majority of manuscripts belongs to this translation, upon which the printed editions are also based. Textual variants do exist, as one would expect, but are relatively minor. At the start, is stated that Ahmed Paşa, 'the great emir', ordered the translation to be made so that 'it would be easy for those who are ignorant of Persian, and that they can profit from its advice and admonitions'. The translator expresses a particular hope that the work would be of use to ministers.[67] The name of the translator is unknown, and the date of the translation is not stated.

Not all manuscripts preserve the reference to Ahmed Paşa, which is also omitted in the printed editions. Much is mysterious about this translation. Frähn claimed it was composed at the very beginning of the Ottoman period (c. 700/1300), but Dubeux argued that the language reflected the dialect of Istanbul, and so must be later.[68] At any rate, as Yurdaydın points out, a manuscript of this translation dating to 851/1447 exists,[69] so it is certainly one of the earliest extant works of Ottoman historiography, the first original surviving example of which is Aşıkpaşazade's history of the Ottoman dynasty completed in 887/1482. Kazim-Beg, who used the Turkish Ṭabarī in preparing his edition and English translation of the *Derbend-name*, a work of Daghestani local history, suggested the Ahmed Paşa translation was prepared for the Ramazanoğulları, a minor dynasty that ruled Adana on the Mediterranean coast of Anatolia in the eighth/fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth centuries.[70] Kazim-Beg does not explain the basis for this assertion, but it

65 Babinger, *Geschichtsschreiber*, pp. 66–7.

66 F.E.Karatay, *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi Türkçe Elyazmalar Kataloğu*, Istanbul: Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, 1961, I, pp. 157–9.

67 Cambridge University Library, Mm. 4.16, f. 1b.

68 [Bal'amī], *Chronique d'Abou-Djafar Mohammed Tabari, fils de Djarir, fils d'Yezid* (tr. L. Dubeux), Paris: Oriental Translation Fund, 1836, p. viii, who also summarizes Frähn's arguments. However, elsewhere Frähn dated it to the eighteenth century: C.M.Fraehn, 'Ueber die wichtigsten orientalischen Handschriften der Rumänzow'schen Museum's', *Bulletin scientifique publié par l'Académie Impériale des Sciences de Saint-Petersbourg*, 1, 1835, p. 158.

69 The manuscript is Süleymaniye, Aya Sofya 3150. See Yurdaydın, 'Maṭrāḳçı Nasuh'un hayatı ve eserleri', p. 339.

70 *Derbend-Name or the History of Derbend translated from a select Turkish version* (tr. Mirza A.Kazim-Beg), St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1851, p. xix.

is true that one of the Ramazanoğulları was called Ahmed Bey (d. 819/1416); from the point of view of chronology if nothing else, it is possible that he was the dedicatee.[71]

Ḥajjī Khalīfa, writing in the eleventh/seventeenth century, mentions a popular Turkish translation, and it is probably this version, so well attested in the manuscript tradition, to which he refers.[72] Mordtmann, on the basis of the Istanbul edition of 1260/1844, describes the text thus:

> The translation must be very old and was certainly not done in Constantinople. Parts of the language are still very rough and uneducated, and parts are not at all comprehensible in this regard. A close study of the language leads to the assumption that the translation was done in Iraq or Syria around 400 years ago.[73]

As Quatremère states, the Ahmed Paşa translation 'reproduit avec une grande fidélité le modèle que l'auteur avait sous les yeux'.[74] However, he also notes correctly that the Turkish version also adds some information to the Persian text: 'Quelques parties sont traitées avec plus de détails que la traduction persane. Ainsi l'histoire du premier roi de la Perse, Kaïoumars, et de son successeur Housheng, se présente ici avec les développements que la traduction persane est bien loin de reproduire.'[75] In fact the specific passages that Quatremère mentions may be found in as detailed a form in some Persian manuscripts, RAS, Persian 22's treatment of Gayūmarth being at least as detailed as that of the Turkish version. Elsewhere, however, the anonymous translator tells us at the start of his lengthy discussion of Alexander's career that he based his account on Ḥakīm 'Umar Niẓāmī's version.[76] There is also a tendency to suppress Bal'amī's disagreements with Ṭabarī, replacing them with a phrase such as '*şöyle rivayettir*, this is the story'.[77] The text contains numerous Arabic poetical and Qur'ānic quotations, which are invariably accompanied by a Turkish translation.

71 On the Ramazanoğulları, see İ.H.Uzunçarşılı, *Anadolu Beylikleri ve Akkoyunlu, Karakoyunlu Devletleri*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1937, pp. 176–9.

72 Mustafa ben Abdallah Katib Jelebi, *Lexicon Bibliographicum et Encyclopaedium (Kashf al-Ẓunūn 'an Asāmī al-Kutub wa-'l-Funūn)*, G.Flugel (ed.), Leipzig: Oriental Translation Fund, 1845, IV, p. 130: '*wa-huwa mutadāwal bayna 'awwām al-Rūm:* it is current among the ordinary people of the Ottoman Empire'. Yurdaydın believed that the reference in Ḥajjī Khalīfa was in fact to the translation of Hüseyin b. Sultan Ahmed, discussed below. However, the Hüseyin b. Sultan Ahmed version is only preserved in a handful of manuscripts, so it is more likely Ḥajjī Khalīfa means the popular Ahmed Paşa version. See Yurdaydın, *Matrakçı Nasûh*, Ankara 1963, p. 25.

73 A.D.Mordtmann, 'Nachrichten über Taberistan aus dem Geschichtswerke Taberi's', *ZDMG* 2(1848), p. 286.

74 E.Quatremère, 'Traduction turque de l'Histoire de Tabari', *Journal des Savants*, Septembre 1845, p. 515.

**The translation by Hüseyin b.Sultan Ahmed**

This translation is represented by far fewer manuscripts than the Ahmed Paşa version. Although Karatay lists Topkapı Sarayı, Revan köşkü 1366[78] and 1368 as representatives of it, the text of the latter appears actually to be much the same as that of the Ahmed Paşa translation. The only other manuscripts known to me are Selim Ağa, 766, mentioned by Babinger but which I have not examined,[79] and Süleymaniye, Fatih 4279.[80] It is of course possible that other manuscripts survive, but have been miscatalogued or not catalogued at all. At any rate, it was clearly much less well known than the Ahmed Paşa translation. The translator writes,

> At first this book was in Persian, and Turkish people could not benefit from it. I, the poor, the contemptible, the dust of the feet of the wretched, Hüseyin b.Sultan Ahmed (may God forgive his sins and his errors) translated this book into Turkish… May this book, the most famous of all histories, be a remembrance of me. I began it in 881 AH, on the third of the blessed month of Dhū 'l-Ḥijja (19 March 1477).[81]

The utility of the book derives, according to the translator, from the examples *(ibret)* of justice and injustice, of rule and governance *(sultanat ve emaret ve hükümet),* and of heroes that it provides. Like the Ahmed Paşa translation, it is written in a simple style, and is replete with Qur'ānic quotations and poetry, and indeed the text of the two works is often quite similar, indicating they may have been translated from the same or closely related Persian manuscripts.

**The translation attributed to Hüsameddin Çelebi**

Karatay notes the existence of two manuscripts of the translation of the *Tārīkhnāma* by Hüsameddin Çelebi, presumably meaning the disciple of the great Persian poet and Ṣūfī Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī. One of these, Topkapı Sarayı, Emânet Hazinesi 1391, is in

75 Ibid, p. 522.

76 *Tabari-yi Kebir Tercümesi,* Istanbul: np., 1260, II, p. 111.

77 E.g. ibid, III, p. 120, where Bal'amī's disagreement with Ṭabarī over the Prophet's genealogy is reduced thus.

78 Revan köşkü 1366 is incomplete, ending at Ḥamza's conversion. Karatay indicates that Hüseyin's father was the Jalā'irid ruler of Iraq (d. 813/1409). I have seen no further evidence to confirm this.

79 Babinger, *Geschichtsschreiber,* p. 67.

80 Like Revan köşkü 1366, Süleymaniye, Fatih 4279 ends with the conversion of Ḥamza. Copied 1106/1694.

81 Topkapı Sarayı, Revan köşkü, 1366, f. 2b. Text also given in H.Yurdaydın, *Matrakçı Nasuh,* Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1963, p. 25.

fact a copy of the Ahmed Paşa translation, but one which, like so many others, lacks a reference to Ahmed Paşa. Therefore the sole manuscript which may be identified as Hüsameddin Çelebi's translation is Topkapı Sarayı, Ahmed III 3108. This manuscript is undated, but is probably tenth/sixteenth century, and contains no reference to the translator. Karatay gives no source for his attribution of the work to Hüsameddin Çelebi, but it seems to derive ultimately from a marginal note in a Berlin manuscript of Katib Çelebi's *Kashf al-ẓunūn* which states that Ṭabarī's history was translated by Hüsameddin Çelebi in 710/1310.[82] However, in addition to the silence of the manuscript itself, there is no record in Ṣūfī hagiographies such as Aflākī's famous *Manāqib al-ʿĀrifīn* of Hüsameddin having undertaken any such work. In addition, the date seems suspiciously early for such a work to have been composed in Anatolian Turkish, which was only started to emerge as a literary language at this point, mainly as a vehicle for popular religious poetry. It seems likely that the attribution to Hüsameddin is false, and was invented subsequently to bolster the authoritative nature of the work. Like the other Turkish versions, it contains many Qur'ānic and poetic quotations in Arabic with Turkish translations. Apart from its preface, it differs little in style or content from the other two translations.

### The translations by Nasuh Matrakçı

Very different from the three other translations, the contents and style of which are quite similar, is the translation of Ṭabarī by Nasuh Matrakçı (d. 971/1564) bearing the title *Mecmaʿ* ül-Tevarih, composed in 926/1520 for Süleyman the Magneficent. Matrakçı was a prominent author and artist, and was the author in his own right of two other historical works, the *Fethname-i Kara Boğdan* and the *Tuhfet ül-Ghuzat*.[83] No single complete manuscript of the *Mecmaʿ* survives, and it is likely that much of the work is lost.[84] The *Mecmaʿ* is quite distinct from the other translations. Matrakçı claims to have

82 [Ṭabarī], *Taberistanensis Annales*, J.Kosegarten (ed.), Gryphisvald: E.Mavritii, 1831, I, p. xvi.

83 Babinger, *Geschichtsschreiber*, pp. 66–7.

84 On the basis of an error in Rieu's catalogue, Babinger states that the British Museum (i.e. Library) also possesses a copy, Add 7862. However, in fact this is a representative of the Ahmed Paşa translation. See Yurdaydın, *Matrakçı Nasuh*, pp. 27–48 for a detailed if sometimes misleading discussion of the manuscripts of the *Mecmaʿ*. His most serious error is considering Süleymaniye, Fatih 4278, to be a manuscript of a missing part of the *Mecmaʿ*, an error doubtless induced by reliance on Babinger who makes the same mistake. In fact, Fatih 4278 is a late manuscript of the Ahmed Paşa translation covering the period from the birth of the Prophet (i.e. the final sections of the pre-Islamic portions of the text) onwards. Its only peculiarity (and not a particularly exceptional one at that) is that it includes short verse chronograms giving the death dates of the later ʿAbbāsid Caliphs, which is followed by brief sections on Ghaznavid and Saljūq history, concluding with the appearance of the Ottomans' ancestor Ertughrul. It differs entirely in style from the Vienna and Paris manuscripts which preserve earlier parts of the text, and probably has no connection with the *Mecmaʿ* whatsoever.

made the translation from the Arabic rather than the Persian,[85] although it is unknown whether or not this is true. In any event, the *Mecmaʿ* is so different that it can scarcely be described as a translation of either Ṭabarī or Balʿamī, although it does follow the same structure of interweaving stories of prophets and kings. The text is decorated throughout with poetry, not, as in the other manuscripts, in Arabic, but in Turkish. The verses are clearly of Matrakçı's own composition, and rather than illustrating a point or a moral as they usually do in other versions, they are actually part of the narrative which they serve to advance. Matrakçı also supplements the narrative with information from other, usually unnamed sources. Like the other Turkish translators (except for pseudo-Hüsameddin Çelebi) he includes an extensive section on Alexander.[86] Of immediate relevance to his audience would have been a passage where he recounts the founding of Constantinople, which he attributes to Constantine after his lands had been devastated by the Iraqi king Khiḍr.[87] Like Balʿamī himself, Matrakçı clearly saw himself as far more than a translator, and the *Mecmaʿ* must be considered an independent work.

In 975/1550 Matrakçı produced a second translation of Ṭabarī under the title *Camiʿ ül-Tevarih* at the behest of Süleyman's vizier Rüstem Paşa. This is partially preserved in a unique manuscript, British Library, Or 12, 879. All that survives today is the section from the creation to Bahrām Chūbīn, but according to Matrakçı's preface, originally it continued through Islamic times down to the year of its composition, 975/1550, with sections devoted to the history of the various Turko-Mongol empires.[88] It must have been a vast work, for the extant portions alone take up 430 folios. According to Yurdaydın, the *Camiʿ ül-Tzvarih* is an abridged and simplified version of Matrakçı's earlier *Mecmaʿ*.[89] However, the differences between the works are more substantial than this would indicate. The surviving parts of the *Camiʿ ül-Tevarih* are completely plain in style, and no verse is used. In fact, it appears to be a completely new version, composed very much along the same lines as the other Turkish translations. On this occasion there can be no doubt that the Persian version was the basis of Matrakçı's work, for at one point he specifically mentions Balʿamī: *'ravi el-ahbar Abu Ali el-Balʿami şöyle rivayat eder….* (the transmitter of reports Abu ʿAlī Bal ʿamī relates…)'.[90]

85 Yurdaydın, *Matrakçı Nasuh*, p. 29.
86 Paris, BNF, ms anciens fonds turcs 50, ff. 41a–56a.
87 Ibid, ff. 59b-60b.
88 British Library, Or 12, 879, f. 4a–b.
89 Yurdaydın, 'Maṭrāḳçı Nasuh'un hayatı ve eserleri', pp. 342–4.
90 British Library, Or 12, 879, f. 255b.

## The *Tārīkhnāma* in Chaghatay

Three different translations into classical Eastern Turkish, Chaghatay, are said to exist, although I have been unable to examine any of them in person.[91] The earliest was made during the reign of the Shaybānid ruler Kūjkundī-Khān (r. 918/1512–937/1530), and was finished in 928/1521–2. The translator was the court librarian Vāḥidī Balkhī, who tells us that 'I have translated this chronicle into Chaghatay for the use of his majesty… 'Abd al-Laṭīf Sulṭān, son of Kujkundī Khān'.[92] Simnānī mentions a translation made 'in the name of 'Ubaydallāh Khān Ūzbag Shaybānī which has many omissions and is an abridgement of the Persian.[93] Presumably this is the same as Vāḥidī Balkhī's version.

No manuscripts are securely attested of the second translation, apparently composed before 1182/1768–9 by Muḥammad Ṣādiq Kāshgharī, who wrote for Yūnus tāghī Bey b. Iskandar who ruled Kashgar on behalf of the Chinese empire. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Kāshgharī also translated the history of the Mongols in Central Asia by Ḥaydar Dughlāt into Chaghatay for the same patron, as well as producing various other literary works.[94]

The last translation of Ṭabarī was made by the Khīvan poet and historian Bayānī (c. 1275/1858–1923) in 1300/1882–3 or 1311/1893–4.[95] The cultural efflorescence of nineteenth-century Khīvā saw several works translated from Persian into Chaghatay, including Mīrkhvānd's *Rawḍat al-Ṣafā*.[96] This Chaghatay translation of Ṭabarī was apparently commissioned by Bayānī's patron, the Khān of Khīva Muḥammad Raḥīm II Fīrūz (r. 1281/1864–1328/ 1910), and contained appendices discussing the foundation of the four Sunnī legal schools.[97]

Detailed research on the Turkish Ṭabarī beyond the scope of this book is needed before one can properly assess why the translations were composed, who did so and for whom, and how they relate to the Persian texts. Above, I have merely attempted to indicate which translations exist and outline some of their salient characteristics. Nonetheless, some facts are clear. The Turkish Ṭabarī was immensely popular in the Ottoman world, as is attested by the comments of Ḥajjī Khalīfa and the large number of extant manuscripts dating from at least the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries. By far the

91 See H.F.Hoffmann, *Turkish Literature: a bio-bibliographical survey. Section III: Muslim Central Asian Turkish Literature*, Utrecht: Royal Asiatic Society, 1969, VI, pp. 23–27.
92 *Chronique de Tabari* (tr. Dubeux), p. xv.
93 Oxford, Bodleian, Elliot 374, f. 2a.
94 On the possible manuscripts of Kāsgharī's Chaghatay Ṭabarī see Hoffman, *Turkish Literature*, VI, pp. 25–6, and on Muḥammad Ṣādiq Kāshgharī and his patron, ibid, IV, pp. 20–23.
95 E.Allworth, *The Modern Uzbeks from the fourteenth century to the present: a cultural history*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1990, p. 116; Hoffman, *Turkish Literature*, VI, p. 26.
96 A.Vámbéry, *Travels in Central Asia*, New York: Ayer Co., 1970, p. 347.
97 On Bayānī, see further Hoffman, *Turkish Literature*, II, pp. 240–243.

best-known translation was that made at the behest of Ahmed Paşa. Ṭabarī's work also appealed to a wide range of Turkish-speaking audiences. The Turkish version was almost certainly used for educating the young. At the end of Topkapı Sarayı, Emânet Hazinesi 1391 are Arabic prayers in a scrawled and childish hand, and the large number of manuscripts in this particular library also strongly suggests that it may have been used for teaching the non-Muslim recruits gathered by the *devşirme* who would have started their education under the auspices of the palace, and would have been taught Turkish before some of them moved on to study Persian. Even if Hüsameddin Çelebi did not himself produce a translation, the mere fact that it was attributed to him confirms the evidence of Āmidī's translation that the *Tārīkhnāma* could also appeal to an audience interested in Ṣūfīsm.

The Turkish versions of Ṭabarī were not composed in isolation. As late as the eighth/fourteenth century, many Anatolian Muslims 'were largely illiterate and ignorant of all but the rudiments of their faith. What they knew they seem to have acquired from their forebears' contact with Persian speaking Muslims in Iran and Seljuk Anatolia'.[98] To integrate themselves into the Islamic world, eighth/fourteenth century rulers commissioned Turkish translations of basic Muslim texts, Persian and Arabic, and these translations were aimed at a 'relatively uneducated audience'.[99] Doubtless the early Turkish translation of the *Tārīkhnāma* was inspired by similar motives. Likewise, Matrakçı's *Mecmaʿ* was just one of a large number of translations made in Süleyman's reign, with works of both literature and scholarship being rendered into Turkish. The *Tafsīr* of Kāshifī (d. 910/1504), Ghazzālī's (d. 505/1111) *Kīmiyā-yi Saʿādat*, a version of *Kalīla wa Dimna* and works of *fiqh* are just a few examples of the other books translated.[100] According to Çelebioğlu, the impetus for this translation movement came from the Sultan himself, who personally ordered the Turkish versions to be made. The highly literary nature of Matrakçı's *Mecmaʿ* ül-Tevarih suggests that, unlike the other Turkish Ṭabarī translations, it was not intended for educational purposes. Rather, it was destined for the sultan and his court, for whom it provided an elegant account of history loosely based on a classic source.

98 C.Imber, *The Ottoman Empire: the structure of power 1300–1650,* Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002, p. 225.
99 Ibid, loc. cit. and p. 341.
100 For details see A. Çelebioğlu, *Kanûnî Sultân Süleymân Devri Türk Edebiyatı,* Ankara: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1994, pp. 117–120.

# 6
# General conclusions

The preceding chapters have demonstrated that Balʿamī's *Tārīkhnāma* is a complex and rich work in its own right, and is far more than an abridged translation of Ṭabarī's Arabic *History*. By way of conclusion, I shall attempt to answer three of the most important questions relating to the work which are essential to understanding it. They concern the reasons why the *Tārīkhnāma* was commissioned, why it differs so much from Ṭabarī's *History* and why its manuscript tradition is so complex. Of course, given the state of the *Tārīkhnāma's* text, absolute certainty about Balʿamī's intentions is impossible, and the conclusions below are thus offered as working hypotheses.

### Why were the translations of Ṭabarī commissioned?

There is no evidence to support the contention that the *History* or the *Tafsīr* were translated as part of a campaign against heresy. By the 350s/960s, Ismāʿīlism was probably quiescent in the Sāmānid heartland of Transoxiana, even if it remained a force elsewhere. Niẓām al-Mulk's account of an Ismāʿīlī takeover during Manṣūr b. Nūḥ's reign is not credible. While some other heterodox groups did exist, most, such as the Manichaeans and *Sapīd-Jāmagān*, were too few in number to pose a challenge to the state even if they had wished to. Muʿtazilism, one of the targets of *al-Sawād al-Aʿẓam*, was occasionally patronized by high Sāmānid officials, and anyway only ever appealed to the educated élite. If both Ṭabarī and Balʿamī's works do articulate a broadly 'mainstream' Muslim perspective (despite their occasional differences), at no point does the *Tārīkhnāma* or the *Tarjuma-i Tafsīr* appear to be a response to specific heretical views. Indeed, while Ṭabarī had frequently attacked views with which he disagreed in the Arabic *Tafsīr*, this polemic is omitted in the Persian *Tafsīr*. It would rather defeat the point of commissioning a translation of a work in order to counter heresy if the translation did not then highlight the original's anti-heretical stance rather than ignoring it. Thus while there can be little question about the orthodoxy of the two Persian translations, it seems unlikely that they were intended as an anti-heretical polemic.

It has also been suggested that the translations were commissioned in response to the conversion to Islam of large numbers of Turks, many of whom lived within the Sāmānid domains where they frequently held positions of power and influence. Thus the translators, as well as providing 'standardized, officially approved and carefully designed versions of prestigious religious texts which could be used to instruct unsophisticated

readers in a uniform way', aimed to promote 'the further Persianization of frontier areas and the acculturation of the new Turkish military élite'.[1] It is certainly true that the translations, particularly the *Tārīkhnāma,* were used in this way in later times, under the Mongols and the Ottomans, for example. Yet there is much to indicate that this was not the case in the fourth/tenth century. The translators are distinctly disingenuous in their claim that the Persian versions were made for the benefit of those who did not know Arabic. Both the Persian *Tafsīr* and the *Tārīkhnāma* are equipped with Arabic prefaces and contain numerous untranslated quotations in that language. It is hard to believe that these 'unsophisticated readers', let alone steppe Turks who might anyway have only a limited knowledge of Persian, would have understood the Qur'ānic passages, the poetic quotations or rhymed prose that can be found throughout the *Tārīkhnāma.*

Furthermore, it is quite clear that 'Persianization' was far from the translators' minds. As early as the sixth/twelfth century, the author of the *Mujmal al-Tawārīkh va-'l-Qiṣaṣ* had noted that the Iranian past is where the *Tārīkhnāma* is at its least detailed. If Bal'amī supplemented Ṭabarī from other works, these were not Zoroastrian or Pahlavī sources, but Islamic ones, probably written in Arabic, such as Ibn Isḥāq. Indeed, Bal'amī gives no emphasis to the role of Persians in history. Far from being a narrative in which Iran is central, the *Tārīkhnāma's* focus is in fact on Islam. In this sense it is faithful to Ṭabarī's original which provides 'an organic historical explanation for the identity and role of the Muslim community'.[2] Thus if the *Tārīkhnāma* was ever intended to encourage 'acculturation', it was acculturation to an Islamic world view, not a Persian one.

The reasons for Manṣūr b. Nūḥ's patronage of the Persian versions of Ṭabarī must be considered in comparison with other such translation movements in the mediaeval Islamic world. It is true that some, as in mediaeval Anatolia, commissioned translations purely for linguistic reasons. Yet the situation in fourth/tenth century Transoxiana was very different: the Sāmānids were not a dynasty of recent converts with a hazy understanding of Islam, and their élite would have known Arabic well. The audience of the *Tārīkhnāma* and the *Tarjuma-i Tafsīr* would have had to have known some Arabic to understand much of either work.

An interesting example of the political and propagandistic uses of translation is evident in a much more famous translation movement, that of the early 'Abbāsid period, lasting from the second/eighth to the fourth/tenth centuries. Arabic translations of a vast range of Greek, Syriac and Pahlavī works were made, with only history and literature excluded. While some of these translations did have an obvious practical use, such as the works of Galen for physicians, this was not the reason why the movement received official support. As Dimitri Gutas has shown in his study of the social and political

1 E.Daniel, The Samanid "Translations" of al-Tabari' in H.Kennedy (ed.), *Al-Ṭabarī: a medieval Muslim historian and his work,* Princeton: Darwin Press, forthcoming, [p. 12].
2 F.M.Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: the beginnings of Islamic historical writing,* Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998, p. 130.

context of the translation movement, the Caliph Manṣūr (d. 158/ 775) and his successors promoted the translation movement out of political expediency. The ʿAbbāsids had come to power as a result of a civil war in which they had been supported by many Persians, and needed both to strengthen their own legitimacy and to reconcile the interests of the various groups that had supported them.

> The way in which the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs tried to legitimize the rule of their dynasty was by expanding their imperial ideology to include the concerns of the 'Persian' contingent. This was done by promulgating the view that the ʿAbbāsid dynasty, in addition to being the descendants of the Prophet and hence satisfying the demands of both Sunnī and Shīʿī Muslims, was at the same time the successor of the ancient imperial dynasties of ʿIrāq and Iran…. In this way they were able to incorporate Sasanian culture…into mainstream ʿAbbāsid culture.[3]

Zoroastrian imperial ideology, for example, formed one of the cornerstones of the ʿAbbāsids' own dynastic ideology. As Gutas argues, Zoroastrian ideology depends on the notion that translation not only exists, but is a cultural good, for otherwise

> the ideological claim of the Avesta as the source and origin of all science and philosophy for all nations cannot be reconciled with the historical facts of, first, the incontrovertible supremacy of Greek letters in the post-Hellenic world in the Near East and, second, translations actually made from Greek (and Sanskrit) into Pahlavī during the Sasanian empire…. In order to be effective, the Zoroastrian ideology thus rests completely on translation.[4]

Some of various Persian groups—ranging from separatist movements to the *dihqāns* to Zoroastrian revivalists—whom Manṣūr hoped to co-opt into supporting the ʿAbbāsid regime may have been more at home in Arabic than in Pahlavī at this date. Gutas suggests that '[t]ranslations of traditional Zoroastrian material into Arabic was an important propaganda tool to convince those Arabized Persians who would not have known Pahlavī of the inevitability of the Umayyad downfall and of the validity of the Zoroastrian tradition whose revival was envisaged'.[5] This translation movement was, then, a legitimatory exercise. The process of translating Pahlavī works, rendered inevitable by Zoroastrianism's emphasis on translation, both symbolized and effected the transfer of Sāsānian ideology and legitimacy to the ʿAbbāsids.

The translation movement of the Sāmānid period was motivated by similar considerations, the need to legitimize the ruling dynasty through the actual and symbolic

3 D.Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: the Graeco-Arabic translation movement in Baghdad and early ʿAbbāsid society (2nd–4th 18th–10th centuries)*, London: Routledge, 1998, p. 29.
4 Ibid, p. 45.
5 Ibid, p. 48.

transfer of knowledge.[6] It is impossible to judge exactly how many Zoroastrians survived in Central Asia at this date, but they were probably a small minority and it is unlikely that the Zoroastrian imperative for translation would have directly influenced the movement. Certainly the Sāmānids and their court were thoroughly islamized, although they modeled their administration on that of the Abbāsids, itself ultimately heavily influenced by Sāsānian precedents. The culture which needed to be appropriated to bolster the Sāmānids' legitimacy was not Iranian, but Islamic. In an age when Shī'ite states dominated the Islamic world and the Caliphate itself had fallen under Shī'ite control, the Sāmānids ordered the translations of two of the most prestigious and famous Sunnī works, Ṭabarī's *History* and *Tafsīr*. This asserted their commitment to defend Sunnism, effectively taking over the mantel of the Caliphate in this respect.

It was from the assumption of this role that the Sāmānids' legitimacy derived. At a time when their power was declining and territories were being lost either to rebellious vassals like Alptegīn or to the Shī'ite Būyids, the need to reassert their credentials as upholders of orthodoxy must have been more pressing than ever. Thus Manṣūr b. Nūḥ attached such importance to the translations because his legitimacy as ruler depended on being accepted as the defender of Sunnism. He was right. When the Sāmānid state fell, it fell not because of heretical movements, or even Būyid Shī'ism or Ismā'īlism, but because the ulema no longer accepted that it was the Sāmānids and the Sāmānids alone who would uphold their faith. As now respectable Muslims, the Turkish Qarakhānids, pagan half a century before, were welcomed into Bukhārā without resistance. The Ghaznavids, who inherited much of the Sāmānid Empire, likewise sought legitimacy as defenders of Sunnī orthodoxy against Shī'ism. It was the conversion of these Turks to Islam shortly before Manṣūr ascended the throne which ensured the Sāmānids' demise, for it meant there were now other political entities which were capable of assuming the Sāmānids' role as defenders of Sunnism. When the Sāmānids' weakness rendered them unable to perform this role, the Turks easily obtained the support of the ulema to replace them. Thus the Ṭabarī translations are indeed legitimatory and connected with the rise of Shī'ism but not in the ways previous scholars suggested. Bal'amī's neglect of Persian history is quite understandable: it really had very little relevance to what the Sāmānids were trying to achieve by the translations.

It is likely that the main audience for the *Tārīkhnāma*, and the translation of the Tafsīr and *al-Sawād al-A'ẓam*, was above all the 'semi-professional' ulema who were the basis of pious Transoxianan society. These would presumably have been more at home in Persian than Arabic, which was probably only widely used among the bureaucratic and religious élites. Nonetheless, they would have had some knowledge of Arabic, as was necessary to understand religious texts. However, the Sāmānid translation movement was not purely concerned with making religious classics more widely accessible to piety-minded individuals with a shaky grasp of Arabic. The involvement of the most senior

6 J.S.Meisami, *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999, pp. 287–8.

figures in the Sāmānid state—the amir himself, Fā'iq the military strong man, and the vizier Bal'amī—underlines the deep political importance that the translation project had. For most of their subjects, the Sāmānids' commitment to orthodox Islam was the basis of their right to rule, not any spurious genealogies linking them to Sāsānian heroes. The translation of Ṭabarī was a public demonstration of the Sāmānids' credentials as pious Sunnīs in a world in which they were ever more isolated, caught between Shī'ism in the west and the converted steppe Turks in the east.

## Why are there so many differences between the Persian translation and Ṭabarī's original?

I have suggested above that Bal'amī's conception of the past is in many ways similar to Ṭabarī's, even if the ultimate purpose of the two works is different. This poses the question of why Bal'amī adapted Ṭabarī's text so radically, making the *Tārīkhnāma* far more than just a translation. Several factors were at work here. The first is that while Ṭabarī's *History* may in general have represented the consensus of mainstream Muslim opinion, it was by no means free of its author's biases. Some of these did not suit Bal'amī's purposes. This is best illustrated by Ṭabarī's treatment of Ḥusayn's death, where Shī'ite authorities are used to detract the blame from Yazīd. Bal'amī, while by no means a Shī'ite, doubtless sought the assent of as many readers as possible for his version of history, and modified Ṭabarī's account to appeal to moderate 'Alid opinion. Likewise, the bias of Sayf's account of the apostasy of Tamīm was all too apparent, and needed to be corrected to produce a more widely acceptable version of the past. Bal'amī needed to appeal to as many as possible of the educated, piety-minded classes to whom his translation was addressed if his legitimatory project was to succeed.

Secondly, Ṭabarī's *History* is structured around the promotion of certain reports of certain transmitters above others. Famous transmitters were well known for proto-Shī'ism or Sunnism, for interest in legendary matters, or for unreliability. While Ṭabarī may promote one account over another, the reader still has a choice. Bal'amī moulds these dissenting voices into one. He never chooses the facts given in one report by one transmitter to translate, as would have been perfectly possible and doubtless considerably easier. Rather, he takes something from each account and combines them to produce a new narrative. This obfuscates questions of the relative merits of various transmitters, and while the resulting narrative may be more readable than Ṭabarī's seeming jumble of *akhbār*, it deprives the reader of any chance to exercise his own judgement of its reliability. Bal'amī thus becomes the architect of the 'master narrative' in Donner's phrase, creating an authoritative and indisputable vision of the past.

Finally, in keeping with his role as this authoritative narrator, Bal'amī did not see himself as a mere translator. By explicitly disagreeing with Ṭabarī, he not only distances himself from some of the former's well known biases, but stresses that he is an independent historian in his own right, whose work is modelled on Ṭabarī's but not

solely dependent on it. Balʿamī's audience were after all never intended to read the *Tārīkhnāma* as a literal translation of Ṭabarī, but as an expression of the Sāmānids' political will to defend the sort of Islam that Ṭabarī had promoted.

### Why is the manuscript tradition of the *Tārīkhnāma* so complex?

A simple explanation for the complex and confused state of the text of the *Tārīkhnāma* lies in the work's popularity. Because it could be used for a wide variety of purposes, from legitimizing the ruler to teaching recent converts the fundamentals of Islam, from providing moral lessons to attacking heresy, the *Tārīkhnāma* was naturally adapted according to the particular interests of its audience. It seems, for instance, that Turkish readers had greater interest than Persian ones in Alexander the Great, possibly because Mehmed the Conqueror regarded him as a model, although this was also true of the Īlkhān Ghāzān. Another factor was the duration of the *Tārīkhnāma*'s popularity. Over course of nearly a millennium, the language was constantly updated to suit contemporary tastes.

Above all, one must remember that manuscripts are very different from printed books, and scribes were not merely a less effective means of mechanically reproducing text. The idea of transmitting 'benefits' was crucial in allowing scribes to add to, delete from or emend the text they were copying: if it would benefit his audience, this would ensure the scribe enjoyed a reward in the hereafter and could only be advantageous to all. The boundaries between author, translator and scribe were extremely flexible, and there was not perceived to be nearly so great a distinction between them as there is today.

At the same time, some scribes did take measures to copy the texts before them as accurately as possibly, using the oldest manuscripts at their disposal. As the false colophons of MSS Tashkent, Beruniy, 2816 and 4226 demonstrate, a premium was put on old manuscripts. Such manuscripts were probably aimed at a wealthier market that could afford to pay more, the same people who would commission copies of the great ʿAbbāsid classics, for instance. Yet this interest in antique manuscripts, whether genuine or false, came too late and was too limited to allow the accurate reconstruction of Balʿamī's Persian text.

In addition, as Chamberlain stresses, 'the boundaries between written and oral reproduction of were not fixed. Shaykhs reproduced texts from memory at public performances'.[7] Islamic culture had always emphasized the importance of memorizing texts, considering it a more reliable means of transmission than writing. It is likely that oral reproduction is also responsible for some of the shape of the *Tārīkhnāma*, whether through the fallibility of memory, or the deliberate interpolation of passages as explanatory asides which were then integrated into the text. The clearest example of this is the interpolation on the Ismāʿīlīs in MS Leiden University Library, Or 1612.

7 M.Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 144–5.

The complexity of the textual tradition of the *Tārīkhnāma* is by no means unique. It is unusual solely in the number of manuscripts that have survived, which allows an exceptionally clear view of the various processes of transmission they underwent. The fact that manuscripts were transmitted in this way suggests that editors' attempts to establish texts on the basis of stemmata may be fundamentally flawed in some cases, for such neat divisions of manuscripts into families of redactions are not always possible.

The *Tārīkhnāma* of Bal'amī raises numerous complex questions. This study has been limited to a few salient aspects of the work, in an attempt to resolve the most obvious problems, and as stated in the Preface, it is not intended to be a comprehensive survey. There is much room for further research. More detailed studies of other parts of the text accompanied by a comparison with Ṭabarī's original would be highly desirable. The Turkish translations also offer a rich field for future research, and the vast number of manuscripts of the Persian text are a virtually inexhaustible subject.

It is clear that Bal'amī's *Tārīkhnāma* must be considered an independent work from Ṭabarī, commissioned to legitimize the Sāmānid regime as defenders of Sunnism. Its appeal is based on the fact that it reflects broadly mainstream Muslim opinion, and this made it one of the most popular historical works of the entire Islamic world. However, although the number of extant manuscripts of the *Tārīkhnāma* is exceptional, in many other ways it is entirely representative of the problems of Persian and Islamic historiography. literature intersected and interacted in the mediaeval Islamic world. A study of historiography can improve our understanding of the preoccupations of works' patrons even when, as is the case with the *Tārīkhnāma*, the historical works themselves contain no information about a given dynasty.

Historiography, if treated in the right way, can thus offer us a much more nuanced view of the past than we have at present, as long as works are not dismissed for failing to live up to our expectations but are assessed on their own terms. Furthermore, problems of how texts have been transmitted to us and to what extent we can rely on published editions need to be taken much more seriously if our knowledge of Islamic historiography is to advance significantly. historical works are required to allow us to understand the development of Islamic historiography and the relationships between texts. sIf the endeavour of studying their history is to be worthwhile, then it must be based on a proper comprehension of how Muslims themselves saw their past, how they portrayed it and what it meant to them. Perhaps the most apposite conclusion, however, may be left to Bāyazīd b. Ṣadr al-Dīn, the scribe responsible for preserving probably the oldest text of Bal'amī, who wrote in the colophon to MS Cambridge University Library, Add 836 (f. 238a),

*yalūḥu 'l-khaṭṭu fī 'l-qirṭāsa dahran/*
*wa-kātibuhu ramīmun fī 'l-turābi*

Writing shines forth on paper forever/
While its writer is rotting in the earth.

# Appendix I
# Comparison of postulated redactions of the *Tārīkhnāma*

### A) Comparison of Zotenberg's postulated redactions

Zotenberg argued that his postulated 'primitive' redaction was distuished from the 'new corrected redaction' by generally being more concise. A comparison of the following extracts from each postulated redaction demonstrate this was not always the case.

#### *i) Zotenberg's 'primitive' redaction*[1]

According to Abū 'Ubaydah 'Abdallāh b. Sallām in his book *Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*, Muhammad said, 'Of all the people to whom I presented Islam, there is not one who did not make difficulties *(kabwa)* save Abū Bakr, who did not hesitate for a moment (*tala"athama*). The expression *tala"athama* is used of someone who is about to say something, and his tongue will not consent to say it, so he hesitates, which is *kabwa*. This word is derived from that for a fire-lighter in Arabic. When one strikes a stone on metal and a fire is produced, it is said to be affected by *warā*, but when one strikes it a lot and no fire is produced, it is said to be affected by *kabā'*. So the meaning of the report is that everyone suppressed his tongue except Abū Bakr, who, the moment the call [to Islam] entered his heart, the light of Islam appeared on the tip of his tongue.

Muḥammad b. Jarīr [Ṭabarī] says in this book that Zayd b. Ḥāritha, the *mawlā* of the Prophet, converted before Abū Bakr, and said that 50 people had become Muslim when Abū Bakr converted. This report has no basis, and all the *akhbārīs* and Muslims disagree with it.

#### *ii) Zotenberg's 'new corrected redaction'*[2]

Abū 'Ubaydah in his book *Gharīb al-Ḥadīth* reports of the Prophet, peace be upon him, that he said, 'I did not present Islam to anyone without them having thought about it save Abū Bakr. He became a Muslim not by thought but by desire, and did not delay in saying the word of Truth.' They say that Zayd b. Ḥāritha was the next to convert.

1 For Persian text, see *Tārīkhnāma*, V, p. 1331. French translation, *Chronique de Tabari* (tr. Zotenberg), II, pp. 399–400, based on his mss F and G which he identifies as 'primitive'. The French translation contains a couple of inaccuracies, doubtless derived from the manuscripts used by Zotenberg, which obscure the play on kabwa and *kabā'*.

**B) Comparison of two manuscripts of Daniel's postulated 'late redaction'**

The substantial differences between the text of the passages given below illutrate the difficulty of trying to classify manuscripts according to redaction.

***i) British Library, MS IO Isl 2669, f. 155b***

This Muḍar was one of the ancestors of the Prophet. Lordship of Mecca was initially in the hands of Ghālib. It then passed to Luʾayy, then to Kaʿb, then to Murra. These were all ancestors of the Prophet and were chiefs of the Arabs and Mecca until the time of Kilāb when Quṣayy b. Kilāb seized the *siqāya*. Then the Banū Khuzāʿa gathered together to make war on Quṣayy, and Quṣayy summoned his relatives, and gathered Banū Fihr, Banū Ghālib, Mudrik, Ilyās—12 tribes in all. Khuzāʿa were stronger and defeated them, and Quṣayy fled to the chief of the tribe, Durājj, who was his brother. He asked him for help, and he came with all Banū Quḍāʿa. They made war and defeated the Khuzāʿa and Quṣayy was victorious and seized the *ḥijāba* and *siqāya*, and the lordship of Mecca and control over the Kaʿba. He gathered all his kin and named them 'Quraysh' so that people would know they were the best in war. The original meaning of quraysh in Arabic was 'gathering': *taqarrasha ʾl-qawm idhā ijtamaʿū*. Some say it is the name of a horse which overcomes everything in the sea, and Quṣayy compared them to that horse. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbbās (may God be pleased with them both) relates the following poetry:

> A *quraysh* is what dwells in the sea/ Quraysh are called 'quraysh' after it. It eats the lean and the fat, and does not/ leave any feathers on a winged creature.
>
> Thus in the Book does the tribe of Quraysh/ eat up the land At the end of time, they will encounter a tribe who will multiply/ killing and wounds among them.

***ii) British Library MS IO Isl. 1983 (Ethé 9), f. 313a-b***

Chiefdom of all the offspring of Nizār and Āl Maʿadd b. ʿAdnān came to Muḍar, who was the ancestor of our Prophet. The children of Nizār were many, and the descendants of ʿAdnān likewise, and Maʿadd's dependents were so many that their number was unknown. Muḍar was the chief of all the tribes of the Arabs, and he had a son he named Ilyās who inherited the chiefdom. He had two sons one called Mudrika, the

2 RAS, Persian 22, f.166b; *Tārīkhnāmah*, III, p. 39.

other Ṭābikha. Mudrika was one of the ancestors of the Prophet. Both these two's names were nicknames: Mudrika's [real] name was ʿAmr, and Ṭābikha's was ʿĀmir. When they grew up, one day they were with their father by the camels, cooking a cock. The camels escaped, and Ilyās said to ʿAmr, 'Get up and gather the camels'. To ʿĀmir he said, 'Cook the cock'. That day he named ʿAmr Mudrika and ʿĀmir Ṭābikha and these nicknames remained with them. Ilyās seized the chiefdom of all the sons of Rabīʿa, Muḍar and Ābād, and was chief over every tribe of Nizār. Sometimes they lived in the desert, sometimes in Mecca, but they did not hold lordship over Mecca, because it was in the hands of the Banū Khuzāʿa. Mudrika was descended from Maʿadd and ʿAdnān, and the descendants of Ismāʿīl were in Mecca, and were a large part of the population. The day that Ibrāhīm brought Ismāʿīl to Mecca, there was one tribe [already] there, part of the Banū Jurhum. When the tribe of Khuzāʿa arrived, they defeated Jurhum and settled there, and many people are descended from them. Khuzāʿa is an Arab tribe, and they were drowned and destroyed. Some of their descendants are scattered around the world, as God said, 'We have scattered them, each one'. Arabs fall into two groups, one the descendants of Maʿadd, one of Qaḥṭān. The army and people of Yemen are Qaḥṭānids and the Arabs of the desert are Maʿaddids. The history of Jurhum has been recounted in the story of Ismāʿīl. Ismāʿīl married a woman from Jurhum and had children by her, who dispersed in the desert. Maʿadd and ʿAdnān in particular settled in the desert and had children, and Nizār, Muḍar and Ilyās did likewise. Then they came to Mecca and stayed there, and when they were numerous one group settled there permanently and one group settled in the mountains. But lordship of Mecca belonged to the Khuzāʿa, and consisted of two things, *ḥijāba* and siqāya. Some of Ismāʿīl's sons lived in the desert, and some in Mecca. When Ilyās died, lordship of the Arabs came to Mudrika, and after him to his son Khuzayma, and from him to his son Kināna and from him to his son Naḍr. This Naḍr made Mecca his seat. They called him Naḍr because his face was very handsome. He wanted to take the lordship of Mecca and to seize the *ḥijāba* and *siqāya* from Banū Khuzāʿa, but he was unable to because Khuzāʿa were many. His kin and clan were descended from Kināna, Khuzayma and Mudrika, and along with Muḍar's children they were scattered in the desert and mountains. Naḍr could not defeat Khuzāʿa, so he said to them, 'Give me this *siqāya* and the *ḥijāba*, the keys of the Kaʿba and the lordship of Mecca will remain yours'. They gave him the *siqāya*. Then the chiefdom passed from him to his son Mālik, and from him to his son Murra, then to Kilāb, those whose names we have related who were ancestors of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him. Until the time of Quṣayy b. Kilāb, the chiefdom of the Arabs remained in the family and tribe of Nizār. When Kilāb died, his son Quṣayy was small and still breastfeeding, so the lordship and *siqāya* reverted to the Khuzāʿa. [etc…the text continues for several folios before reaching the verses about Quraysh cited above.]

# Appendix II
# Comparison of the Arabic translation of the *Tārīkhnāma* and the Persian text

The question of the accuracy of the Arabic translation of the *Tārīkhnāma* preserved in Add 836 is difficult to resolve, as we lack the text of the original Persian manuscript from which it was translated. Given the variants in the Persian manuscript tradition, one cannot rely on a simple comparison of the published text of the *Tārīkhnāma*—or any other manuscript of it—for the text the translator of Add 836 used may well have been very different. Bearing this caveat in mind, two passages from Add 836 are compared with RAS, Persian 22. They illustrate two different extremes typical of the contents of Add 836: in the first instance the text of both the Persian and Arabic versions is very close, in the second they are very different.

### Passage One: The raid on Khaybar (extract)

#### *A) Arabic text of Add 836, f. 112a–b*

غزوة خيبر و كانت خيبر كلها فى ايدي اليهود فلم يكن حصار قط احصن منها و كانت سبعة حصون بعضها في بعض حولها نخيل و بحذايها على مسيرة فرسخين قبيلة غطفان من العرب فكانوا عونا لهم فخرج النبي عليه الصلوة و السلام مع المهاجرين و الانصار و استخلف على المدينة سباع بن غرقطة من بني غطفان فكان لكل حصار رئيس يدعا ذلك الحصار باسمه احدها ناعم و الثانى قموص فرئيسه كنانة بن ابي الحقيق و الثالث كتيبة فرئيسه الصعب بن معاذ و الرابع السنوة و الخامس النطاة و السادس الوطيح و السابع السلالم فحاصرها النبى عليه الصلوة و السلام خمسة عشر يوما فجاء بنو غطفان ليعينوهم ثم خافوا النبي عليه السلام ان يبعث الى قبيلتهم جيشا فيسبيهم فرجعوا الي قبيلتهم فاخذ النبي عليه الصلوة و السلام الصداع و الشقيقة فكلما اخذه ذلك كان لا يخرج الي الناس ثلثة ايام او اربعة و اخذ علي بن ابي طالب وجع العين فبقى فى الخيمة فدعا النبي عليه الصلوة ابا بكر الصديق فقال له خذ راية الاسلام فحارب فذهب فحارب خارج الحصن الاول فالقى من رأس الحصار رحا الطاحونة فقتل محمود بن مسلمة اخ احمد بن مسلمة فرجع ابو بكر مساء بلا تاثير ثم سلم اللواء غدا الى عمر فامره بالحرب فرجع مساء بلا تاثير فقال النبي عليه الصلوة لاعطين الراية غدا رجلا يحب الله و رسوله و يحبه الله كرارا غير فرار فلما اصبح اجتمع الخلق عند اللواء يتوقع كل واحد منهم الراية لنفسه.

***B) Persian text of RAS Persian 22, f. 202b, ed. Rawshan in* Tārīkhnāma*, III, pp. 230–1***

خیر غزو خیبر و این خیبر هم جهودان داشتند و حصاری نبود جهودان را از آن استوارتر و هفت حصار بود یک از دیگر بزرگتر و خرماستانها بود گرداگرد آن حصار و برابر ایشان بر دو فرسنگ بنی غطفان بود پس پیغمبر علیه السلام سباع بن عرفطه را بر مدینه خلیفت کرد و بیامد و بر در خیبر نشست و خیبر را هفت حصار بود یکی را ناعم و دیگر را قموص و سدیگر را کتیبه واین حصن المظفر خواندند و مهتر این حصار الصعب بن معاذ نام بود و پنجم را نطاه و ششم را الوطیح و هفتم را سلالم پس پیغمبر بیامد و بر در حصار نشست پانزده شبانروز و به حصار همی داشت و مردمان بنی غطفان به پای خویش بیامدند که ایشان را یاری کنند پس باز بترسیدند که پیغمبر به حی ایشان سپاه فرستد وزنان و فرزندان ایشان را برده کند پس ایشان به حی خویش باز گشتند و پیغمبر را درد سر گرفته بود وشقیقه و هر گاه که اورا آن بگرفتی سه چهار روز به سوی مردمان بیرون نیامدی و علی را درد چشم گرفته بود و به خیمه اندر مانده پیغمبر بو بکر را بخواند و گفت رایت اسلام بگیر و مسلمانان را ببر و حرب کن بو بکر آن روز برفت و به حصن بیرونی حرب کرد واز دیوار حصار آسیا سنگی بزرگ بیامد و محمد بن مسلمه را برادری بود اورا بزد و بکشت و بو بکر تا آخر روز باز گشت و چیز نکرد دیگر روز پیغمبر لوا عمر بن الخطاب را داد واورا حرب فرمود کردن عمر برفت وآن روز حرب کرد و هم چیز نکرد و باز گشت پیغمبر علیه السلام گفت لاعطین الرایة رجلا یحب الله و رسوله و یحبه الله یاخذها عنوة پس هر کس از قریش و از آن مهتران مسلمانان گوش همی داشت که پیغمبر رایت ایشان را دهد.

***Comments***

The Persian and Arabic texts are remarkably similar, and there is no significant divergence. Normal scribal errors account for the confusion in both manuscripts in the account of the names of the castles of Khaybar, although it is interesting to note that Add 836 contains a slightly fuller account of this. It is clear that the text from which Add 836 was translated was very close to RAS, Persian 22 at this point, and the Arabic translation was quite literal.

## Passage Two: the conquest of Hamadān

### *A) Arabic text of Add 836, f. 150a*

حديث فتح همدان و كان اهل همدان نقضوا صلح حذيفة و جمعوا عسكرا كثيرا فبعث اليهم عمر بن مقرن فلما التقى الصفان تقاتلا ثلثة ايام و ليالى فهزمهم نعيم و دخل همدان فهرب المنهزمون الى الرى و كتب كتاب الفتح الى عمر على يدي ثلثة نفر سماك بن حرشة و سماك بن محرمة و سماك بن عبيد فقال لهم عمر ما الخبر قال احدهم خير و قال الاخر فتح و قال الثالث غنيمة فقال الله اكبر فسألهم عن اسمائهم فقالوا سماك فقال اللهم سمك بهم الاسلام.

### *B) Persian text of RAS Persian 22, f. 253b*

خبر گشادن همدان نعيم بن مقرن با سپاهى بزرگ سوى همدان شده بود و به همدان مردى بود از عجم نام او خيش آن صلح با حذيفه كرده بودند شكسته بودند و شهر حصار گرفته و سپاه بسيار بر خويشتن گرد كرده چون نعيم بيامد او از سپاه آذربايگان مدد خواست و عجم بسيار از آذربايگان بيامدند كه اورا يارى كند بر حرب نعيم و خبر به سوى عمر شد رضى الله عنه كه سپاه عجم بسيار از اذربايگان روى سوى نعيم نهادند عمرتافته شد و نامه كرد به حذيفه به نهاوند كه هر سپاهى كه با تو هست سوى نعيم فرست به همدان و چون عجم بسيار بر خيش گرد آمدند به همدان از حصار بيرون آمدند و پيش نعيم آمدند به روستايى از همدان به دشتى نام او واج رود و حربى كردند سخت تر از حرب نهاوند و سه شبانروز حرب كردند پس آخر خيش كشته و لشكر بگرفت و از هزيمتيان سپاه تا به ساوه بفرساد به سه منزل از رى واز همدان تا رى شش منزل است چون سپاه از ساوه باز گشتند به همدان غنيمت قسمت و خمس غنيمت با فتح نامه به فرستاد با سه تن هر سه را نام سماک يكى سماک بن خرشنه و ديگر سماک بن مخرمه و سديگر سماک بن عبيد چون سوى عمر رضى الله عنه شدند عمر را دل مشغول بود از بهر آن لشكر و راه دور بود و خبر گسسته بود گفتا چه خبر است گفتا خير ديگر گفتا فتح سديگر گفتا غنيمت عمر رضى الله عنه شاد شد گفتا الله اكبر پس هر كهرا از ايشان نام بپرسيد كه چه نامى گفت سماک عمر رضى الله عنه از شادى گفت اللهم اسمک بهم الاسلام يا رب تو مسلمانى بر ايشان بدار.

***Comments***

In this instance, the differences between the Arabic and Persian texts are much more considerable, the Arabic omitting any mention of Khīsh's role in opposing the Arab conquest of Hamadān. However, the account of the Caliph ʿUmar's reception of the three messengers bringing news of the victory at Hamadān is very similar in both Arabic and Persian, with the Arabic lacking the Persian's description of ʿUmar's happiness on hearing the news, but relating the conversation in identical terms. The substantial differences between the two texts are probably to be accounted for by the manuscript tradition rather than a deliberate policy of the Arabic translation to abbreviate the Persian. This is suggested by the evidence of the Mashhad manuscript which does not contain this passage at all. In an instance such as this, it is impossible to ascertain for sure which text (if any) is more faithful to Balʿamī's intentions. However, the final sentences of the Persian which are common to Add 836 indicate that where the text is shared by both, Add 836 offers an unembellished, although possibly slightly abbreviated, translation of the Persian.

## Conclusion

The evidence of the passages discussed indicates that where the text of the Persian manuscripts is also that (or related to that) of Add 836, the Arabic translation of the *Tārīkhnāma* offers an adequate translation of the Persian with very little alteration beyond that required by idiom. Where there are substantial differences between Add 836 and a given Persian manuscript, these can be explained by the processes of textual transmision discussed in Chapter 2 which give rise to so many variants in the Persian textual tradition. Thus it is reasonable to treat Add 836 as credible textual witness for the lost Persian manuscript from which it was translated in the eleventh century.

# Appendix III
# Addenda and corrigenda to Daniel's 'An Annotated Inventory of Balʿamī Manuscripts'[1]

*+ indicates the manuscript should be added to Daniel's list.*

*− indicates the manuscript should be removed from Daniel's list.*

** corrections or additions to Daniel's description of the manuscript.*

* Baku. Academy 1.

This manuscript (classmark D 282/6512), held in the Füzuli Institute of Manuscripts, apparently dates to 1244/1828. It was unavailable for inspection on my visit.

– Baku. Academy 2.

This manuscript (classmark B 657/2275) is not a Persian, but a Turkish manuscript of Balʿamī, a representative of the Ahmed Paşa translation, and is of only the first volume of the work. A late ms (nineteenth century) of 457 folios. The last chapter is entitled *Ḥadīth-i hijrat-i nakhustīn musulmān* (f. 454a). No colophon. Currently held in the Füzuli Institute of Manuscripts, Baku.

– Bursa. Genel Kütüphane 1612 (F).

Daniel is referring to Bursa, İnebey Yazma ve Eski Baska Eserler Kütü-phanesi, Ms. Genel 1612. This is, however, not a manuscript of the *Tārīkhnāma* but of the Sāmānid *Tarjuma-i Tafsīr*. For comments see *Tarjumai Tafsīr-i Ṭabarī*, Ḥ. Yaghmāʾī (ed.), I, Introduction, p. 9. The library's card catalogue lists no Persian translations of the *Tārīkhnāma,* but it does contain Turkish ones with the following classmarks: Orhan 969; Kurşunlu 146; Genel 1582/7, the latter being described as 'selections from al-Ṭabarī's *History* and the *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman*'.

+ Cambridge University Library. Or 2147.

A twelfth/eighteenth century manuscript. Incipit: *Sipās va āfrīn mar khudā-yi kāmkār va kāmrān va afrīnandah-yi zamīn va āsmān-rā*. Continues down to death of the Prophet. 380 folios.

* Edirne. Selimiye 1036.

This ms is currently held in the İl Halk Kütüphanesi in Edirne as Selimiye 1036. The ms, of 248 folios, is incomplete, covering the period from the lifetime of the Prophet to the reign of ʿUmar. F. la is a table of con-tents which indicates that the volume ended with the *Khabar-i firistādan-i Muʿāviyah amīrān bi-aṭrāf-i Ḥijāz va-ʿIrāq*, but no

1 E.Daniel, 'Manuscripts and editions of Balʿamī's Tarjamah-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī *JRAS* 3rd series, 2(1990), pp. 309–21.

such chapter has survived. Incipit f. 2b.: *Khabar-i firistādan-i Payghambar ʿalayh al-salām rasūl-rā bi-mulūk-i zamīn*. Last chapter (ff. 246b-248b) entitled *Ḥadīth-i al-ʿAlā' b.al-Ḥaḍramī*. Numerous folios misplaced, e.g. f. 190b: account of arbitration between ʿAlī and Muʿāwiyah, f. 193a: murder of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, f. 218a: the *Ridda*. No colophon. Probably seventh/thirteenth century. Judging from the surviving fragments, the text is similar to that of London, RAS, Persian 22, the basis of Muḥammad Rawshan's published edition, although without the obvious Shīʿite tendencies of that manuscript.

* Istanbul. Evkaf Müzesi 2171.

The manuscript is held in the Türk-İslam Eserler Müzesi in Istanbul as ms 2171. The date given by Daniel, 735/1334–5, is correct. The copyist's name is Abu 'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Ansī al-Jīrānī (?). Due to its poor state of preservation, I was only able to inspect the first and last folios of this manuscript. It has the Persian introduction, incipit: *sipās va afrīn khudāy va kāmrān va afrīdgār-i zamīn u asmān-rā*. Continues up to the reign of al-Mustaẓhir. A large manuscript of approximately 480 folios.

* Istanbul. Süleymaniye, Aya Sofya 3050.

Daniel's statement that 'like the Mashhad manuscript, it is very detailed and resembles a translation of Ṭabarī more than most manuscripts' seems without foundation. Aya Sofya 3050 no more resembles a translation of al-Ṭabarī than any other manuscript does, and has little obvious in common with the Mashhad manuscript. Few of the passages which are exceptionally detailed in the latter manuscript, such as the death of Yazdagird b. Shahriyār, are present here. Daniel suggests that the manuscript is of East Anatolian origin. He does not explain this attribution, although his probable reasons are the mention of Ustādār al-Khilāṭī (f.1b) (from Akhlāṭ near Lake Van) and the manuscript's supposed similarities to the Mashhad manuscript which was copied in Erzincan. However, the note makes it clear that the manuscript was merely sold to al-Khilāṭī in Muḥarram 749/1348; the original owner was Fatḥ Allāh b. Niẓām al-Dīn al-Shirvānī. The attribution of the East Anatolian origin is therefore insecure.

* Istanbul. Süleymaniye, Aya Sofya 3051.

The manuscript is both more carefully written and in better condition than Aya Sofya 3050.

* Istanbul. Süleymaniye, Damad İbrahim 919.

Daniel describes the manuscript as 'part of an album containing Balʿamī's work with a continuation by Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū'. The whole work consists of the *Tārīkhnāma*, Rashīd al-Dīn's *Jāmiʿ al-Tawārīkh* and the *Ẓafarnāma* with linking passages and an introduction by Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū, and is entitled *Majmūʿa-i Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū*. *Abru*.

* Istanbul. Süleymaniye, Fatih 4281.

As noted in Chapter 5, the Niẓām-i Iran, Rukn al-Dunyā va-'l-Dīn, Ghawth al-Ḍuʿafā' va-'l-Masākīn, Amīr Ghāzān' for whom the manuscript purports to have

been written, cannot be identified with the Īlkhānid Sultan Ghāzān, as he had died long before the work was copied. Nonetheless, an old and fine copy.

* Istanbul. Süleymaniye, Fatih 4285.

*Pace* Daniel, this manuscript is not Virtually identical to the the Royal Asiatic Society [Persian] 22 manuscript'. Although both do contain an Arabic preface, Fatih 4285 contains greatly abbrieviated accounts of Kayūmarth and Bahrām Chūbīn, in contrast to the extended versions presented by RAS, Persian 22. Unlike the latter manuscript, it contains a chapter on the *sīrat va nasab va awlād-i* ʿ*Uthmān*, and omits the mention of the Greek authorities for the doxology. The name of the copyist, Aḥmad b. Najm al-Dīn al-Khaṭṭāṭ al-Akhlāṭī, does suggest an Eastern Anatolian origin may be possible for this manuscript.

* Istanbul. Topkapı Sarayı, Bağdat Köşk 282.

This manuscript was unavailable on my visit due to its poor state of preservation.

* Leiden. University Library Cod. 1612.

An interesting early manuscript, dated 754/1353–4. As discussed in Chapter 5, it contains an appendix with accounts of various mediaeval dynasties such as the Sāmānids, Ṣaffārids and Būyids, covering events down to the Mongol period. As the contents of the appendix and interpolations in the manuscript indicate, the scribe had a particular interest in polemicizing against Ismāʿīlism.

* London. British Library, Add 7622.

*Pace* Daniel, the contents of this manuscript are not particularly exceptional. It is certainly not as eclectic as the Mashhad manuscript or Oxford, Bodleian, Laud Or 323. Some scribal errors, e.g. f. 54a, Āmul is consistently spelt ĀMK.

* London. British Library, Or 5343.

This eighth/fourteenth century manuscript is important as it demonstrates the use of al-Ṭabarī's original Arabic text for collation. Ff. 1–31 are much later in date, and the exordium is given in two versions, both Arabic and Persian, the former taken from al-Ṭabarī's original. See comments in Chapter 2. In general, quite close to British Library, Add 7622.

* London. British Library, Or 7324.

Daniel describes the manuscript as a *Qiṣaṣ-i Anbiyā'* composed of passages taken from al-Ṭabarī via Balʿamī, and thus as an unimportant manuscript. In fact it is one of our earliest Balʿamī manuscripts, although very fragmentary. It is dated by Mīnuvī in a note on the inner cover to the sixth/twelfth century (except for ff. 1–17 which are much later). It contains parts of the pre-Islamic section up to the prophet al-Yasaʿ. Unfortunately, some folios appear to be out of place. As in Cambridge University Library, Add 836, most chapters are entitled *Ḥadīth . . .*, and the letter *dāl* is generally dotted, indicating its antiquity.

* London. Royal Asiatic Society, 22 [=Persian 22].

See Chapter 2 for detailed comments on this manuscript. While it does derive some importance from its antiquity, its utility is somewhat marred by the scribe's Shīʿite tendencies. From internal evidence (e.g. confused spellings), it was collated with a number of manuscripts.

* London. British Library, Ethé 2 [=IO Isl 2669].

An early (probably eighth/fourteenth century) manuscript with later repairs (e.g. ff. 1–12, 130, 165 and 315–353 are later replacements for the presumably damaged original folios).

+ Oxford. Bodleian, Elliot 373–4.

This is a nineteenth-century re-edition of Balʿamī by Abū ʾl-Qāsim b. Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Simnānī. However, the contents appear unaffected by Simnānī's activities, which were restricted to updating the language. Concludes with the death of Marwān in 132 AH. Simnānī was aware of the work's textual problems and also the existence of a Chaghatay translation (see f. 2a). In many ways the text of Simnānī's edition is closer to Add 836 than other Persian manuscripts.

* Oxford. Bodleian, Elliot 377.

The *Tārīkhnāma* represents only the first half of this manuscript. The second half is part of Rashīd al-Dīn's *Jāmiʿ al-Tawārīkh*.

* Oxford. Bodleian, Laud Or 323.

An extremely interesting and early manuscript, probably before eighth/ fourteenth century. In places the text is much more detailed than other manuscripts, as in the description of the punishment of al-Walīd b. ʿUqbah, governor of Kūfah, for drinking wine. However, it also entirely omits numerous passages such as the account of Bahrām Chūbīn. Numerous folios have been misplaced, and a few at the end are clearly missing. Some blank folios and spaces for chapter headings: unfinished. No colophon. Purchased in Constantinople in 1638 by John Greaves, Fellow of Merton College, for the collection of Archbishop Laud. Probably the oldest manuscript to have survived reasonably intact.

* Oxford. Bodleian, Ouseley 206–8.

The scribe was aware of textual variants (Ouseley 208, f. 552a).

* Paris. Bibliothèque Nationale, Blochet 238 (Anciens Fonds [Persans] 63). See comments in Chapter 2.

+ Paris (?). Private collection, location unknown. An illustrated Tīmūrid manuscript sold by Drouot Richlieu in 1999. See Chapter 2, n. 24 and Fitzherbert, '"Balʿamī's Ṭabarī"', I, p. 2, n. 6.

* Tashkent. All manuscripts described by Daniel as held in the 'Akademii [sic] nauk Uzbekskoi SSR' are held in the Abu Rayhan Beruniy Oriental Institute of the Academy of Sciences.

* Tashkent. Akademii nauk Uzbekskoi SSR 3463.

Abu Rayhan Beruniy Oriental Institute, 2073.

Fragment of 264ff lacking beginning or end. First complete chapter (f. 3a) entitled *Ḥadīth-i Sajāḥ bt. al-Ḥārith*. Ends with death of ʿAlī, final chapter entitled *Dhikr-i Nasab-i Amīr al-Muʾminīn ʿAlī b. ʿAlī Ṭālib*.

* Tashkent. Akademii nauk Uzbekskoi SSR 3464.

Abu Rayhan Beruniy Oriental Institute, 2816.

The manuscript, while seventeenth-century, purports to date from 583/1188. Probably of Bukhāran origin. Chapters on later Iranian kings and Bahrām Chūbīn entirely omitted, while extended section on Jesus included.

* Tashkent. Akademii nauk Uzbekskoi SSR 5609.

Abu Rayhan Beruniy Oriental Institute, 4226.

A manuscript of 443 folios, purporting to date from 674/1275–6, but probably eleventh/seventeenth or twelfth/eighteenth century. Introductory verses (f. 1b) as well as the colophon stress this false date. Interesting for its two different accounts of Jamshīd, attesting collation.

* Tehran. Bahār 186.

Now Kitābkhāna-i Majlis, 3160. Unavailable on my visit. See M.T.Bahār, 'Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabari in M.Qāsimzāda (ed.), *Yādnāma-i Ṭabarī*, Tehran 1369, for description.

* Tehran. Majlis 2291.

The manuscript is not 'very unusual' and it certainly does not use a chronological arrangement of material to any greater extent than other Balʿamī manuscripts. It is, however, quite detailed. The confusion is probably due to the manuscript's omission of chapter headings. Probably nineteenth rather than seventeenth century.

* Tehran. Majlis 5575.

Persian preface, but contents generally quite similar to RAS, Persian 22: extensive sections on Kayūmarth and Bahrām Chūbīn, but entirely omits *nasab ʿUthmān*. Also like RAS, Persian 22, preserves archaisms such as *mazgat* for *masjid*.

– Tehran. Majlis 7656.

Not a Balʿamī manuscript at all, but a copy of the *Dīvān-i ʿUrfī-yi Shīrāzī*.

+ Venice. Bibliotheca Marciana.

As noted by Daniel in his article 'The Samanid "Translations" of Tabari', Ms Or 171 is an eighth/fourteenth century manuscript.

+ Washington. Freer Gallery of Art.

Fitzherbert's thesis ''"Balʿamī's Ṭabarī"' is devoted to this manuscript, to which refer for details.

+ Washington, Library of Congress.

Classmark 1–85–154.69 R. This is a fragment of two folios from the beginning of an Īlkhānid manuscript of the *Tārīkhnāma* with the Arabic preface.[2]

– Unknown. Kevorkian Manuscript.

See under Washington, Freer Gallery of Art.

2 I am most grateful to Dr Christiane Gruber for drawing my attention to this fragment and kindly sending me an image of it.

# Bibliography

## A. Manuscript sources

*Manuscripts of the* Tārīkhnāma *are listed according to alphabetical order of the city in which they are held. This list covers only those manuscripts directly cited in the main text; see Appendix III for comments on other manuscripts.*

### *1. Persian manuscripts of the* Tārīkhnāma


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*Oo.6.10*
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*Selimiye 1036.*
Istanbul. Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi.
*Aya Sofya 3050.*
*Aya Sofya 3051.*
*Fatih 4231.*
*Fatih 4285.*
Leiden University Library.
*Or 1612.*
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*Or 5344.*
*Or 7324.*
*Add 7266.*
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*IO Isl 1983.*
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Balʿamī, Abū ʿAlī, *Tarjuma-i Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī: ḥavādith-i sālhā-yi 15 tā 132 hijrī*, M.Mīnuvī (ed.), Tehran: Bunyād-i Farhang-i Iran, 1345.
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*Elliot 374–5.*
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